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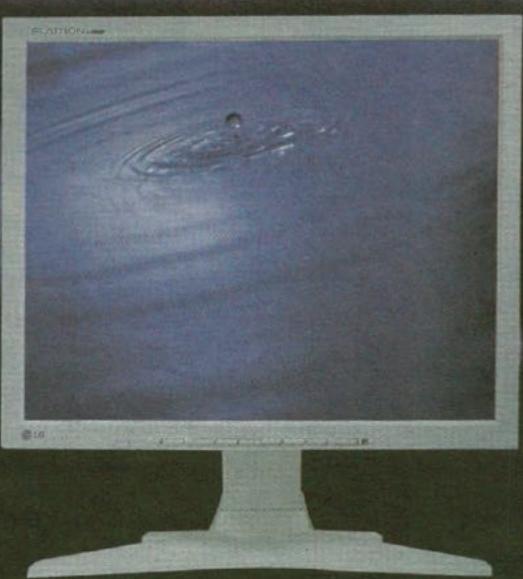
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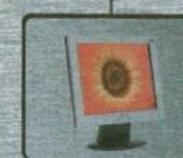
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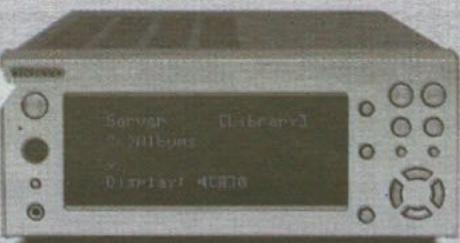


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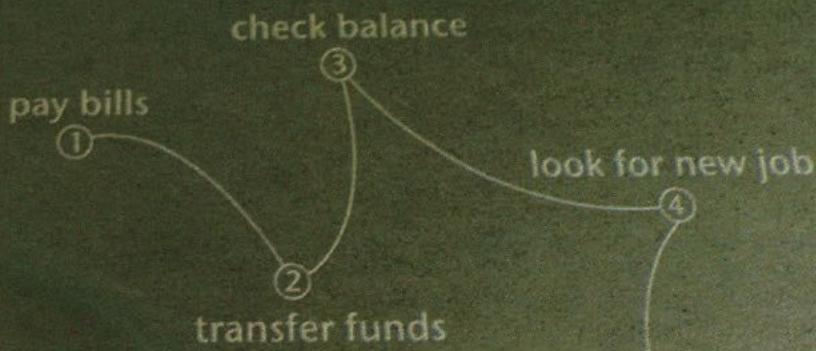
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See page 54 for details on a new Photo Spree Assignment.

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If you are like me, there is a ton of technological flotsam and jetsam in your life. Technology has a way of advancing and leaving a lot of debris in its wake.

This editorial column is inspired by the death of my Mac Plus. The fact that it lived so long is a wonder. The fact that I care is another one. I like the original Macintosh shape. It has this classic industrial look that is not surpassed — even by the ubiquitous iMac. The original Mac looked great with its boxy shape and tiny black and white screen.

It is the display that has bought the farm. The monitor on those Macs was always the Achilles heel. My monitor lasted a long time but finally packed it in. I'm looking at it, with its external 120 MB hard drive, and think to myself that it is the end. I haven't used it for a long while, so I won't miss it in terms of productivity. However, there is the sentimentality. I hold on to these machines even though they are absolutely useless. I still have every computer I have had but one. (My brother has a 350 MHz PC that I bought when 350 MHz was fast.)

My Amiga 1000 sits forlorn in my mom's basement. Right next to it is the 386 PC, with 4 MB of memory, which has had some parts cannibalized — the floppy drive and hard disk are missing. On a shelf above these two computer relics is my old 286 laptop — my computer mainstay through three years of travel. The hard drive refuses to boot up and I have not gotten



around to fixing it — there are some important files on the hard drive, I think. At my place of abode I have my old Mac Plus, whose screen just died, and a Mac Powerbook whose battery won't hold a charge.

The Mac Powerbook's screen size is nearly the same size as the one on the Mac Plus. It would be nice to be able to grab the one from the Powerbook and put it into the Mac Plus, but they are not compatible with each other. I was thinking of emptying the guts of the Mac Plus and fitting the Powerbook's guts into the Mac Plus case, but after playing with my Powerbook, after years of neglect, I realized that, being a pre-Power PC Mac, it is not very good for anything that I would want it to do — it won't play MP3s, for example.

Don't be confused — I have leading-edge stuff that I use to test new software and peripherals. It is just that I have never disposed of any obsolete equipment. I've always believed that I can somehow make use of these obsolete relics of technology. I own three dot-matrix printers, for crying out loud. I still have hope for them.

The death of my Mac Plus's monitor has changed my attitude. I'm not going to keep any of these technological cadavers around me any more. If you want the Amiga 1000, drop me a line. The 386 PC is going to the recycling bin. The 286 laptop will have one last shot of redemption, just to get the files that may or may not be there, before it heads to recycling as well. The Mac Plus's case will be converted to a speaker for my stereo once a similar case is found. The Mac Powerbook will hang around for a little bit longer — for sentimental reasons.

Nestor Gula can be reached by e-mailing nestor@tcp.ca ◆

Reader Feedback

Micro-payments: More Canadian options

Re: Small business still waiting for micro-payment systems, *TC!* January

In your informative and useful article on micro-payments for small business you missed one of the best (in my opinion) providers, namely Internet Secure (www.internetsecure.com).

It is a Canadian company providing to its member-businesses the ability to accept online payments via the major credit cards, in either Canadian or US dollars (or any other currency), without requiring its customers to establish additional accounts such as "wallets." Its credit card discount rate is comparable to the rates banks give to their small business accounts. My experience as a

member-merchant has been very positive.

Themmis Anno

A case for responsible upgrades

Re: Entry-level flat panels, *TC!* January. In your article about flat panel displays Dave Chappelle makes a good argument for making the upgrade from a cathode ray tube (CRT) monitor to a more space and energy efficient liquid crystal display (LCD) model.

However, it is important for your readers to note that in making the upgrade, something has to be done with the outdated CRT monitor. If readers can "trade it for a case of beverage," so much the better, but failing

some sort of re-use, arrangements have to be made for proper disposal of the monitor and the hazardous materials it contains, most notably, between seven and nine pounds of lead in your standard 15-inch CRT.

Leaving a monitor to languish in landfill is not an option. Rather, readers should seek out proper disposal routes, though this will usually cost the person getting rid of the monitor, as the recovered materials don't cover the cost of proper disposal.

Please ask your readers to not just dump their outdated CRTs (monitor, television or otherwise) but to arrange for proper and less harmful disposal.

George Artemenais



The Editor *Toronto Computes!*
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Letters on issues raised in the paper or general computer topics are welcome. Please be brief. We regret that we are unable to look up stories from past issues, suggest products, or solve all your computer problems. All correspondence must include your full name in addition to your e-mail or snail-mail address. Letters may be edited for space or content.

Letter of the Month

For his letter this month, George Artemenais wins a copy of *No One Lives Forever 2: A Spy in H.A.R.M.'s Way*. *NOLF2* is the sequel to the award-winning *The Operative: No One Lives Forever* and continues the story of Cate Archer as she goes up against H.A.R.M. minions. Players must rely on stealth and wits and occasionally sheer brute force to avert a nuclear holocaust.



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Announcements: pressreleases@tcp.ca

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By ANDREW MOORE-CRISPIN

A not-for-profit organization called the Canadian Coalition for Fair Digital Access (CCFDA, at www.ccfd.ca) is setting itself up to oppose the proposed hike in the levy on recordable media.

The CCFDA is a coalition of Canadian retailers including Dell, Staples Business Depot, Radio Shack, Intel and Wal-Mart Canada, among others.

The current levy is applied to CD-recordable media and cassette tapes, with the money collected theoretically going to recording artists and record companies to compensate them for piracy of their intellectual property.

As it stands, the CPCC has collected in excess of \$3 million which has yet to be dispersed and still sits in the collective's coffers, the CCFDA says.

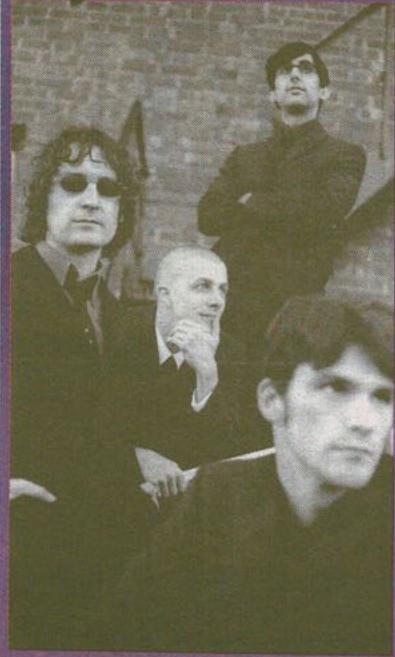
The expanded levy will be imposed on media not exclusive to MP3 players such as Flash Media, CompactFlash and Microdrive cards, found in many consumer digital cameras.

An independent band, Montreal-based The Datson Four, (www.datsonfour.com) played at the CCDFA press event in an attempt to demonstrate how the proposed

levy increase will hinder independent bands using CD-R and other media to distribute their music, and will only benefit established Canadian musicians like the oft-made examples of Celine Dion and Bryan Adams.

"Performers and other copyright holders should be compensated fairly for their work," said Diane Brisebois, president of the Retail Council of Canada, "but not on the backs of people who are not pirates and don't even use these products to copy music."

"The current levy scheme won't help young bands like [the Datson Four]; it will only be a windfall for established artists and their record and publishing companies," she said.



If approved, the current levy of \$1.23 on MiniDisc and CD-R audio will increase 60 per cent, the \$.29 the CPCC collects on audio cassettes will increase 107 per cent and CD-R media will have another 181 per cent added to the current \$.21 per disc levy.

For sale: Small California town

While real estate sales on eBay are nothing new, an American family achieved an eBay

first by putting the town of Bridgeville, California on the virtual auction block.

The 82-acre town sits about 550 km north of San Francisco. The successful bidder received the town, complete with four cabins, nine houses and a cemetery.

The town's 300 residents aren't part of

the deal, but those willing to speak to the news media that have been blitzing the town since the sale was announced have been generally happy about the sale, saying changes to the town could only really be positive, given its current dilapidation.

The sale included pretty well everything in the town with the exception of the roads and school, which are owned by the state, as well as the town bridge, which has been declared a national historic site.

The bidding topped out at US\$1,777,877, more than double the minimum asking price of US\$750,000.

No information is available on the winning bidder at time of writing, and the sellers, a brother and sister team, would be advised not to get their hopes up just yet as big ticket sales, much-hyped eBay auctions are often subject to bogus bids. The seller of hip-hop star Eminem's childhood home found this out the hard way, as bidding on that auction skyrocketed into the multi-million dollar range, but turned out to be much ado about nothing; the highest legitimate bid didn't even meet the minimum reserve, set at US\$120,000. ♦



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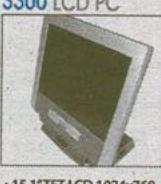


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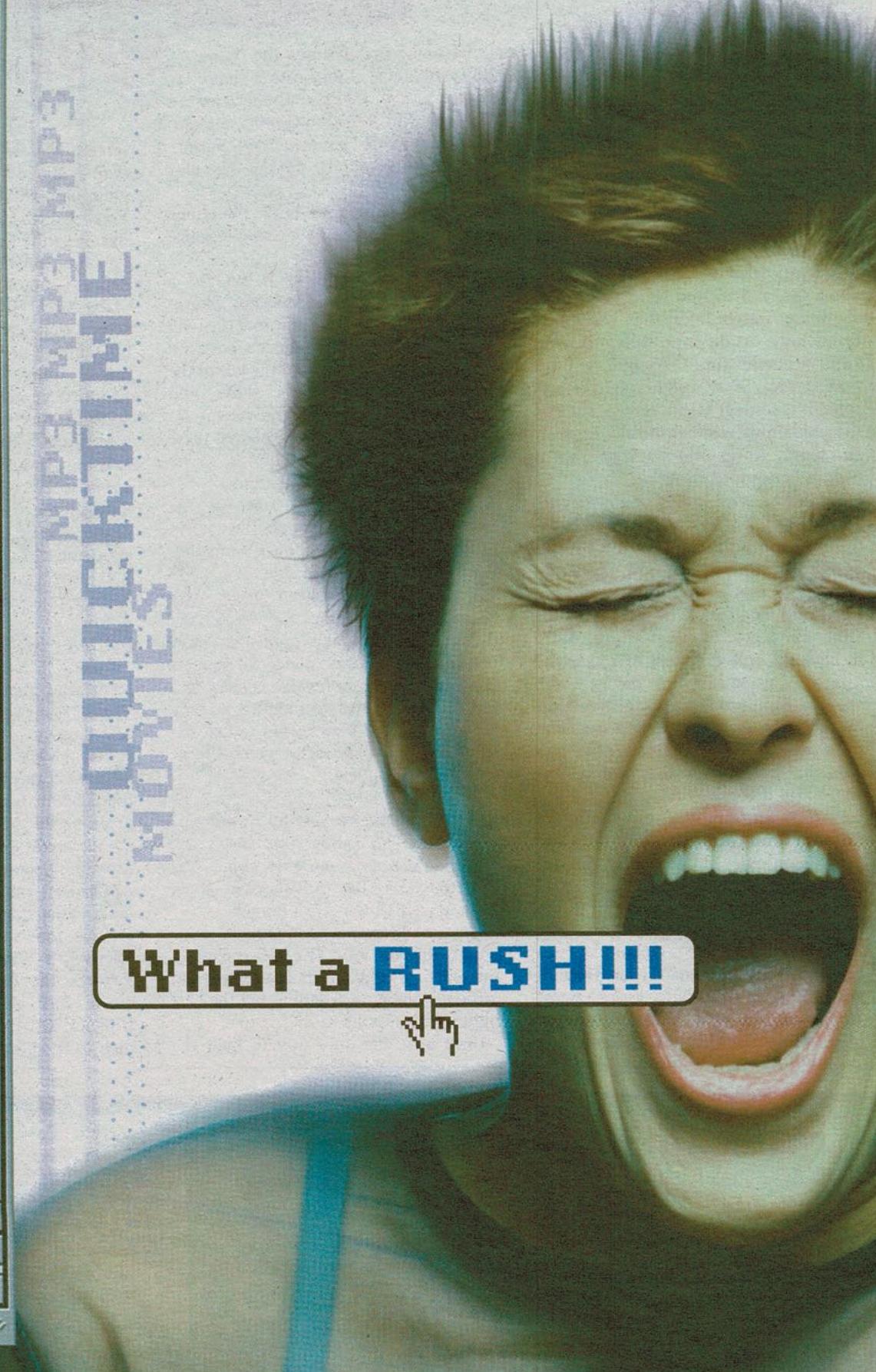


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What a **RUSH!!!**



Gates' SPOT predictions spot on?

By ANDREW MOORE-CRISPIN

Gates' SPOT predictions spot on?

Bill Gates unveiled Microsoft's new Smart Personal Objects Technology (SPOT) implemented into wristwatches in his 2003 Consumer Electronics Show (CES) keynote address in Las Vegas.

While the watches are an RF radio shy of the Dick Tracy watch the gadget lover has long desired, Citizen Watch Co., Fossil Inc. and Suunto were on hand to showcase watch lines that use SPOT technology. Aside from being able to keep accurate time through network time setting, SPOT watches deliver personalized content to the screen, such as the ubiquitous weather, headlines, traffic, sports scores and stock quotes, as well as personal messages.

The information these smart watches receive will be sent over DirectBand, which has been created specifically for SPOT. DirectBand uses FM subcarrier technology that transmits data over the frequency modulation (FM) band of the radio frequency. In other words, SPOT technology will function in much the same way as enhanced car radios, which show an equipped radio station's call letters and in some cases, song or segment titles on the display, though Microsoft says the information displayed on the watch will be context relevant.

SPOT technology will be rolled out in 100 American cities across 50 states and "the largest cities in Canada," in the fall, according to a Microsoft press release.

Handheld battle heating up ... more?

The handheld game segment has been dominated by Nintendo ever since it released its Game&Watch series almost 25 years ago and with subsequent releases like the Game Boy, Game Boy

Color and more recently, the Game Boy Advance. Competitors have come along (Sega's GameGear, Nomad; NEC's TurboXpress; and Atari's Lynx to name a few) but were quickly toppled by the Japanese giant.

Nokia is hoping to buck this trend with the first entry in its mobile game deck line.

The N-Gage handheld is set for a February release, and concept photos suggest the unit will borrow heavily from the Game Boy Advance's horizontal layout, with a D-Pad to the left of the screen, shoulder buttons above and action buttons on the right. As the N-Gage will double as a cell phone, there are considerably more buttons to be worked into the front of the unit.

The game deck will run on the Symbian OS, the same operating system found in many Nokia phones, including the 9210 Communicator line.

A partnership has been struck with Sega to develop games for the system, though no other game publishers have formally announced plans to support the system with software. Games will not be downloaded or bundled as they are on other cell phones, but rather distributed on memory cards, which will be sold at retail outlets.

Handheld battle heating up ... more?

Speaking of Game Boy Advance, Nintendo's newest portable game system, the Game Boy Advance SP, is set for a March 22 Canadian launch.

The GBA SP responds to gamers' complaints that the unit's TFT LCD screen on the existing GBA makes the system too difficult to play in anything but the best lighting conditions.

Until now, the only way to light the

screen was with add-on lights that sit above the screen and create glare or with after market modifications, like the After-Burner. However, installing the light modification requires that the GBA be opened, at a risk to its delicate innards.

The GBA SP uses a front lighting screen that sits on top of the existing LCD, rather than the backlighting commonly found in digital camera and handheld computer screens.

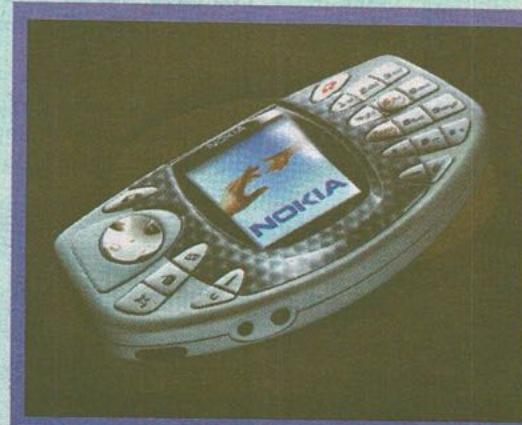
While the system specs and screen size are the same as the existing model GBA, the GBA SP seems to be reverting back to the days of the Game&Watch games of old. The SP opens up clamshell style and closes down to about a 3.25-inch square with a depth of just under one inch.

Not to be confused with PCP

Among the products with significant wow factor at CES in Las Vegas, many companies showed off their own versions of the Personal Video Player (PVP).

Most of the PVP devices on display followed the form factor of current hard drive-based MP3 players, with the notable addition of colour LCD displays of varying sizes.

Microsoft and Intel have teamed up to design the Media2Go, a PVP based around Intel's Xscale processors and Microsoft's Windows CE. Other manufacturers that have announced plans to create PVP products include Archos with its 40 GB Video AV340 with 3.8-inch LCD screen and slick form factor,



and ViewSonic, with its tentatively titled ViewSonic PVP (let's hope they manage to come up with something a little bit more creative) which, when it launches in the fall, will have a 10 GB hard drive and a 3.5-inch, 320x240 pixel display.

Archos was already showing off its Video AV140 model, which also has a 40 GB hard drive and can encode MPEG-4 video at 30 frames per second on the fly, but which has a tiny 237x234 pixel LCD screen. ♦

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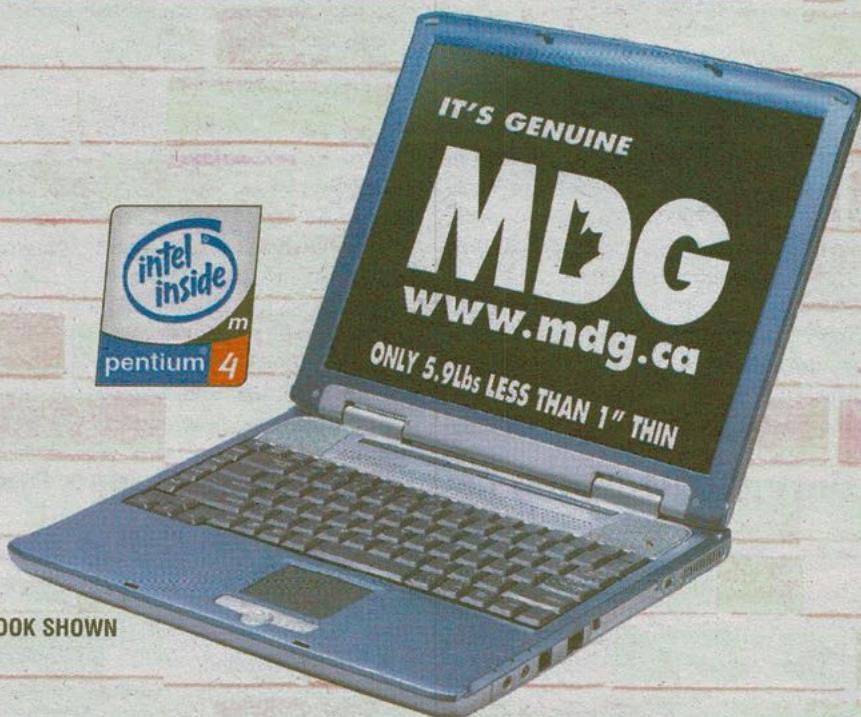
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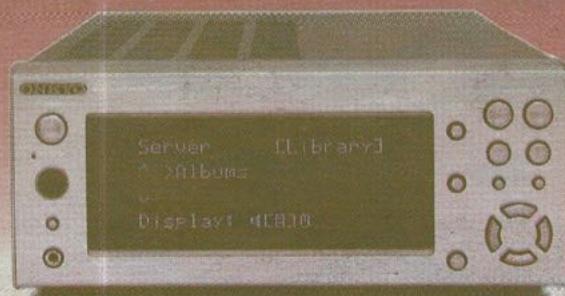
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The PC emerges as a home entertainment server



By DAVID TANAKA

When it comes to home entertainment, convergence is alive and well, with the personal computer making its way to centre stage. The CES 2003 show, held in early January, is the show for consumer electronics, but on the show floor were many companies with names very familiar to us computer enthusiasts.

The reason is simple: all entertainment programming in the home is fast becoming digital. This includes purchased forms such as music and movies, subscription-based forms such as digital

commercial sources, to the creation of professional-quality home movies and slide shows captured with inexpensive camcorders and still cameras and edited on a Windows PC or Macintosh, or the creation of pro-quality music with inexpensive software.

At Macworld, which took place the same week as CES, Apple announced *iLife*, an integrated suite of media production applications. Apple rewrote *iPhoto*, *iMovie*, *iTunes* and *iDVD* so that the separate applications would work better together and named the bundle *iLife*. In his keynote address, Apple CEO

play the MP3 music collections residing on the hard drives of computers on the local area network or play Internet radio stations if the home network had an always-on connection through DSL or cable modem. Onkyo says that up to 12 *Net-Tune* receivers can operate on one network. The scenario this portrays is that different family members could listen to their own play lists from different rooms on their own Onkyo receivers, but have a centralized music library on the PC that everyone could access. Perhaps the biggest limitation to this kind of product, at least in the short term, is that

equipment. But behind the front panel is a 2.53 GHz Pentium 4 processor, 500 MB of RAM, 120 GB hard drive, a six-in-one memory card reader, DVD-RW recorder and USB 2.0 and FireWire ports. Tagar says in a news release that its media center PCs will be available across Canada in Radio Shack and The Brick outlets.

Software to add additional functionality to the media center PC is also starting to trickle out. Sonic Solutions of Novato, Calif. (www.sonic.com) announced *Sonic PrimeTime* at CES, which allows the consumer to burn a TV program to a

Once programming becomes digital, it also becomes data, and what better device to handle any and all forms of digital data than the personal computer.

cable and HDTV and home-grown productions such as digital video, digital photos and music.

Once programming becomes digital, it also becomes data, and what better device to handle any and all forms of digital data than the personal computer. As Craig Barrett, CEO of Intel, said in his CES keynote address, "The PC in my mind is the most versatile piece of equipment in the house; it is the most interactive piece of equipment in the house. It can handle all of the rich data, and it can also create that rich data."

Barrett was alluding to the personal computer as the ultimate recording and playback device. But he also talked about the third flank of convergence: The Internet. It's often been said that computers, communications and content form the "three Cs of convergence" and from this point of view, the computer is one of the primary enablers of digital home entertainment.

The create side

TC! readers already know some of the story of personal digital creation, which goes from simple roll-your-own MP3 compilations of music ripped from com-

Steve Jobs said *iLife* is to digital media productivity what *Microsoft Office* is to integrated office productivity. "It's going to do wonders for our new digital lifestyle," said Jobs.

Interestingly, at CES, ScreenBlast, a division of Sony Pictures Digital Entertainment Inc., was showing *Movie Studio* and *Music Studio*, which promise the same kind of easy media production for Windows users that *iLife* does for Mac users. The slogan for the two Sony applications is "dream it, drag it, drop it, done."

An IP address for your stereo

Coming from the consumer electronics side, some manufacturers are making it simpler for their CE equipment to communicate with the computer. One such company is audio equipment maker Onkyo, which has added an Ethernet port to some of its receivers, including the high-end TX-NR900 that sells for US\$1,500 and the budget-priced NC500 (US\$400 MSRP). Both come with *Net-Tune* PC software that turns the receiver into a network client.

From a *Net-Tune* enabled receiver, a consumer would be able to access and

not many homes have Ethernet cabling installed to every room.

A PC for your stereo cabinet

From the PC side of the industry comes the vision of the PC either eliminating or at least co-existing with traditional home entertainment equipment. Microsoft is one company that has tried to push this vision, and its latest foray into this space is Windows XP Media Center Edition. This special version of Windows XP, available only to equipment makers, allows them to integrate consumer-electronics types of features (including a TV tuner and a remote control unit) that will be supported in Windows. Hewlett-Packard Canada was the first to offer a Media Center PC to Canadian consumers, but it still looks like a tower PC.

On display in Microsoft's booth were designs from other makers that try to stylize the beige box. One of the coolest designs was from Richmond B.C.-based Tagar Systems, a subsidiary of McKinnon Micro Distributing. Tagar's high-end DeZinor doesn't even look like a PC: With its horizontal case and black, brushed aluminum faceplate, it could easily be mistaken for a piece of stereo

DVD disc with one touch of the remote. SnapStream Media (www.snapstream.com) announced similar functionality in its *Personal Video Station 3.0* at Comdex in November.

In the middle, bridges

Between the PC trying to be a home entertainment system at the one extreme and stereo receivers with IP addresses at the other, is a lively dance of products trying to bridge the two worlds. One example is the AudioTron AT200, which Voyetra Turtle Beach Inc. announced at the show. The AT200 looks like a home stereo component. It has analogue and digital output connectors that work with receivers and home theatre audio equipment, plus network connectors that plug into the PC. The device has an Ethernet port plus a phone jack, and will communicate with the PC using either Ethernet or existing phone wiring using HPNA 2.0.

Another example is cd30, a San Diego, Calif. company that introduced a line of network MP3 players, which bridge the PC and home stereo with both network and stereo connections. The c200 and c300 models include an 802.11b wireless network interface. ♦



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By MARA GULENS

Check out the "A Day in the Life" video at Microsoft.com (www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/mediacenter/default.asp). It's supposed to give you a feel for Microsoft's new Media PC, which it does. But it also makes you feel like you're watching an ad for Ikea, because so much of this new piece of technology has to do with the concept of space and home.

If you're a college kid in need of every kind of media imaginable, then run out and purchase the HP Media Center PC with Windows XP Media Center Edition now. If you already own a TV, PC, DVD or CD player, you probably won't be buying one of these goodies in the near future, but it's something worth dreaming about until you do.

But back to the video. Four college kids get together, watch movies, make videos and dance to music – all in the confines of one very small room. And that's precisely who the HP Media Center PC with Windows XP Media Center Edition is intended for, students and people with limited space.

The fact is, this particular piece of technology is so appealing that it will blend into your life in no time, and become impossible to part with. I can

honestly say that when my review time is up, I'll have a hard time shipping this baby away.

Whatcha get

The HP Media Center PC with Windows XP Media Center Edition (call it Media Center for



puting. Moreover, it's a problem if one person wants to play a game and another wants to watch TV at the same time.

While the best thing about the package is the crash-safe remote, which lets you

to even out. But since I already own several computers, two CD players and a television that works, shelling out this much cash for something that makes it all just better and more fun would really be frivolous.

Although I'm not a big TV fan, one of the top things the Media Center does is improve the TV viewing experience. With cable and a broadband Internet connection, you can download the TV guide (do it once and you're set), search

for shows and press "record" to tape favourites. No messing with VCR programming, no money spent on VHS cassettes, and once you watch a show, just press delete to remove it from the hard drive.

For the time being, the Media PC is for people who work and play in one room. But if Microsoft and HP can figure out how to get the product out of the well-to-do student niche and come up with a solution for the rest of us, you can bet I'll be the first to say "aye." ♦

Frivolous, fun and just better

short) is a complete entertainment centre. It's a PC together with a CD player, DVD player/recorder, flash card and memory slots, TV remote and of course, Microsoft Windows XP Media Center software. For the price you also get two external speakers, but the very necessary LCD monitor and extra sub-woofer are additional (though you can connect to the TV or monitor you already own).

The problem is, it still looks and feels like a PC, so for someone like me, placement remains an issue. I like having it in the family room for the TV, video, DV and pictures aspect, but there's really no room to place a desk in the TV area, and that's what you need for standard com-

switch between My TV, My Music, My Pictures, My Videos, Play DVD and Settings with ease, the designers have forgotten to fashion in a cordless mouse and keyboard, meaning any standard PC activity has to be done up close and personal – which in my case means crouching in front of a small monitor stand. Not exactly ergonomically beneficial, and certainly nothing close to what is recommended in the user's guide.

The other thing keeping me from rushing out to purchase this is the price. If I needed a new TV or a DVD recorder, especially a flat screen TV, then I would consider this item: Then the price starts

more info

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h30040.www3.hp.com/mediacentrepc/index.php

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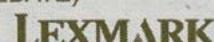
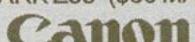
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REVIEW

By DAVID TANAKA

The Consumer Electronics Show has become the must-attend venue for any self-respecting digital technology enthusiast. Consumer electronics covers a huge array of products, but the effects of digital convergence could be seen nearly everywhere, from MP3 car stereos, to full-blown PCs camouflaged as stereo components, to Internet-enabled appliances.

One indicator that the computer industry and the consumer electronics sector are partying together is that both Microsoft co-founder, Bill Gates, and Intel CEO, Craig Barrett, were CES keynote speakers — and predictably both were talking about the central role that digital data and PCs have in tomorrow's consumer electronics developments. Another indication was the number of companies exhibiting that would be just as comfortable at a computer-specific show like Comdex. Following are some of the products we noted during our floor crawl.

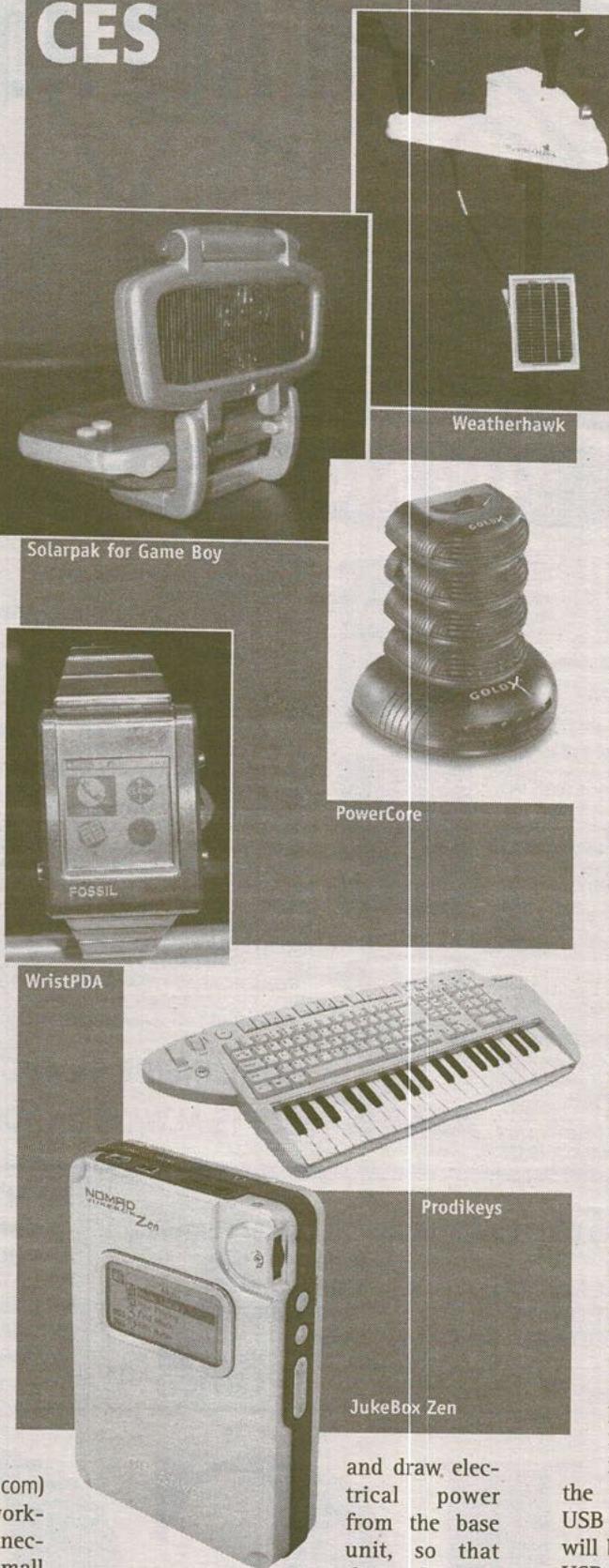
Good sound from Axiom

Axiom Audio, an Ontario-based speaker manufacturer, won an Audio Product of the Year award for its home theatre system, the Epic Grand Master. The award was presented during CES and was given by onhometheater.com, an online publication catering to audio, video and movie enthusiasts. The Grand Master speaker system comprises right, left and centre speakers, two surround speakers and a subwoofer. Suggested retail price is under \$2,400.

PowerCore: When neatness counts

If the area around your computer system is a tangle of wires and connectivity devices, the GoldX PowerCore System from JDI Technologies (www.jditech.com) might help you reclaim your workspace. It's a stackable modular connection system. The base unit is a small uninterrupted power supply, but the unusual part of it is that it also contains a 56-watt DC power supply. Other connectivity hubs (USB, FireWire, Ethernet, etc.) can be stacked onto the base unit,

A cacophony of convergence at CES



have to be powered by separate bricks, reducing cable clutter. The company claims that the base unit will supply power for up to 16 USB or 12 FireWire ports.

Ears wide open at Creative Labs

In the heyday of the Comdex computer trade shows, Creative always had one of the loudest and busiest booths, and at this year's CES, it was clear that the company was at it again, announcing several new products.

With the acquisition of high-end audio and speaker companies a few years ago, Creative set out to eliminate the gap between PC sound and audiophile sound, and its latest SoundBlaster Audigy 2 Platinum eX takes another step towards that. The Platinum eX version is a two piece system — the Audigy 2 PCI sound card and an external break-out box with a slew of connections (FireWire, optical SPDIF, MIDI, and analogue) that resembles the company's Extigy external SoundBlaster for notebooks. The Audigy 2 is THX-certified, and also supports 6.1 Dolby Digital EX movies with a rear centre speaker. Creative claims the Audigy 2 is the first PC sound card to support DVD-Audio, and we were treated to a side-by-side comparison of the Eagles' "Hotel California" on CD and DVD-Audio. It sounded like a completely different recording, but Creative said it was the 24-bit 96 KHz of DVD-Audio, which delivers more audio data.

Other announcements by Creative:

- Prodikeys, which combines a computer keyboard and a 37-key musical keyboard. The music keyboard is located below the ASCII keyboard, and when doing computer-related tasks, the user can put a cover on the musical keyboard, the cover acting also as a wrist support.
- TravelSound MP3, a portable speaker system that also includes an MP3 player and a voice recorder. The unit has 32 MB of onboard memory plus a SmartMedia card slot.
- JukeBox Zen with USB 2.0. The previous hard-drive based Zen model (rectangular design like the iPod only bigger, in contrast to the CD-player shaped Nomad) had USB 1.1 and FireWire, and that model will be joined by a 20 GB model with USB 2.0.
- Graphics Blaster Picture Perfect. This product won't be shipping until later this spring, but Creative is working with ArcSoft to develop image editing applications that use the graphics

processor on the card, or what Creative calls the "visual processing unit," to speed up tasks such as stitching together a series of images into a panorama.

A weather station in your home

If you think the weather channel doesn't do a good enough job of reporting on the microclimate around your humble abode, why not set up your own weather station? WeatherHawk (www.weatherhawk.com), based in Logan, Utah, was showing its line of wired and wireless weather stations designed for home and educational use. The unit

requires mounting on a tower or pole, and includes sensors for wind speed and direction, air temperature, relative humidity, solar radiation, barometric pressure and rainfall. Included software keeps a log of the sensor readings, and also will calculate variables like wind chill and heat index. Optional software will also allow users to link their own weather station on a free (for now) Web hosting site, and then check on their weather from any Web browser.

The wired version connects to a computer through the serial (RS-232) port, and the wireless versions operate on 916 MHz, 922 MHz or 2.4 GHz radio bands.

Let the sun shine on Game Boy

Winner of a CES 2003 "most innovative product of the year" award is Sunpower Systems Inc. (www.sunpower.com) of Canoga Park, Calif., for its Solarpak solar recharger/battery pack for the Nintendo Game Boy. The company also makes a PDA case with a built-in solar panel charging unit, cell phone batteries with an embedded solar charger, and small standalone solar panels with a modular connector system with plugs for specific devices.

Palm your wrist

Fossil (www.fossil.com) had a line of

wristwatches that have a Palm organizer built in. The Wrist PDA, as Fossil calls it, has a 33 MHz Dragonball VZ processor built in, which uses Palm OS 4.1. The screen will display 160x160 pixels and supports 16 grey levels, but rather than showing a full Palm screen on the tiny display, the watch shows fewer icons and less screen information, but at a size close to what you'd get on a regular Palm device. The watch has 2 MB of RAM, and will connect to a PC through USB. It also includes an infrared port, so users can beam information back and forth with other Palm devices. ♦

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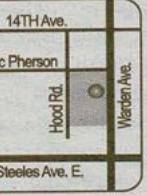
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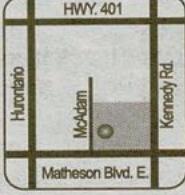
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Home theatre audio on the cheap

By ANDREW MOORE-CRISPIN

Getting home theatre sound into the living room has traditionally been an expensive affair that the average user would need an electronics engineering degree to figure out.

A record number of home theatre audio systems were sold this holiday season, which means some of our readers likely found one under the tree or perhaps in a larger-than-life stocking.

For those of us that weren't that lucky, all is not lost. A simple home theatre audio setup is cheaper than ever before, bringing the total price of a dedicated DVD home theatre ensemble to about the price of your average 24-inch CRT television, and you don't need a full home theatre setup complete with a massive television or an elaborate stereo system to enjoy home theatre audio.

More and more DVDs and console video games are working surround sound into their products, making the time ripe to start taking advantage of the more immersive experience that comes with being surrounded in a wash of high fidelity sound as a movie or video game is being played.

While the very top of the line home theatre would undoubtedly be nice to have, most of us don't need many of the options or the hassle that goes along with setting up and maintaining the ultimate, and setting up an inexpensive 5.1 speaker set can give your current home

entertainment area a new lease on life.

Points to consider

Before considering a home theatre audio system, potential audiophiles need to think about how it will be set up. 5.1 systems, which are the most prevalent right now, come with one subwoofer and five speakers, called satellites. The satellites are defined as centre, front left, front right, rear left and rear right. In other words, in setting up full 5.1 speaker set so as to get the truest and most movie-theatre-like sound, the speaker setup and room acoustics would determine the placement of the furniture. Be prepared to either suffer with less than perfect acoustics or to rearrange the furniture.

Also, setting up a full 5.1 system involves a lot of wires, some of which have to be laid across to the other side of the room to carry the audio signal to



Altec Lansing 251

the rear speakers. For this reason, it is important to look for speakers that offer long enough wires to make it inconspicuously all the way across the room.

Doing it on the cheap

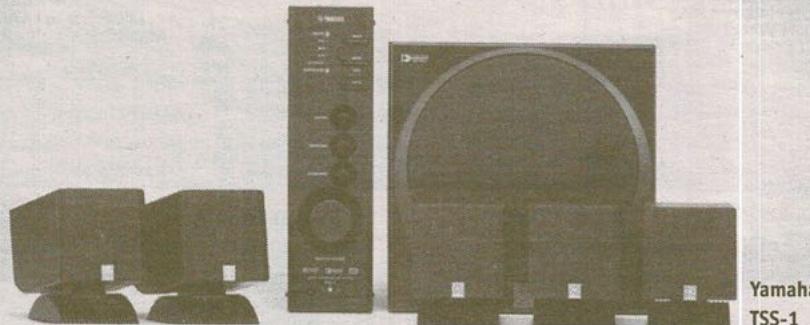
The simplest option for relatively inexpensive home theatre audio is to purchase a DVD player home theatre combo. These have been heavily pushed over the holiday season, and cost approximately \$500. The biggest benefits of these all-in-one systems are that they include everything you need to set up home theatre audio right out of the box, and everything is controlled with

one remote. They also give more control over volume and equalization of the individual speakers. However, for those of us who already own a DVD player or video game console and just want to hook some better speakers up to the thing, there are a number of inexpensive 5.1 speaker sets available that are usually marketed for PC use, but that can also be hooked up to a DVD player, video game console or anything else with AV, mini plug, or, on usually more expensive models, optical or coaxial audio.

The biggest drawback of these speakers is that there is usually no way to control the volume of individual speakers, as this function, it is assumed, would be taken care of with software on the PC.

A note on switching between sources

Hooking everything up to a main receiver that controls the volume independent of the source is the best option for home theatre applications, but another option is to get an AV switcher. These boxes usually accept four or five AV jack inputs, depending on the make and model. The speaker system would



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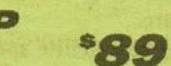
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Home theatre audio on the cheap

continued from page 24

Satellite Speakers: Driver power: 6 Watts RMS (per channel)

Subwoofer: Driver power: 18 Watts RMS

Of the four systems tested, the TSS-1 is the only one with a separate receiver as part of the package.

None of the systems comes with a remote, as they are mostly intended for use with a PC where everything would be on the desk anyway negating the need for a remote.

The TSS-1 is also the only system that takes advantage of optical in, a high fidelity audio source found on higher level DVD players and standard on the PS2.

The biggest advantage the TSS-1 holds over its competitors is the aforementioned receiver with volume, balance, surround and subwoofer (bass) controls on the front and the fact that its cables are thin with extra length given to the rear speakers, making them about seven metres in length; enough to be able to hide the cables under a rug and carry the signal to the rear speakers behind the couch without tripping anyone that tries to walk through.

The TSS-1 was also designed with home theatre applications in mind, and gives users plenty of choices for audio

signal in. The system gives a full rich sound, which as with all of the systems tested, won't impress the true home theatre aficionados, but is more than enough to enhance a movie or video game.

Logitech Z-540

\$99.99 (estimated street price)

Total System Power: 40 Watts RMS

System Frequency Response: 35Hz - 20kHz

Signal to Noise Ratio: >75dB

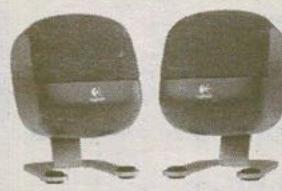
Satellite Speakers: Driver power: 5 Watts RMS (per channel)

Subwoofer: Driver power: 20 Watts RMS

This speaker set is actually a 4.1 system, lacking a centre speaker. Instead, 5.1 signals are converted with the centre signal coming through on both the left and right front speakers.

The Z-540 is also much more for PC use, which means to set it up for home theatre use would require a lot of jury rigging.

Rather than having female in plugs, as are usually found on home theatre speakers, the Z-540 has two male 1/8-inch jacks, one to carry the front signal and one for the rear signal. As a desktop system, the Z-540 gives a balanced sound with good surround. The speakers are also the best looking and most balanced of the lot, as the four speakers



Logitech Z-540



aren't satellite speakers and can reproduce a wide range of sounds, both bass and treble.

However, the relatively short and fat speaker cables, along with the fact that many adapters and converters would have to be used makes it unsuited to home theatre audio use.

Hercules XPS 510

\$139 (from US\$89.99)

Total System Power: 60 Watts RMS

System Frequency Response: 40Hz - 20kHz

Signal to Noise Ratio: >65dB

Satellite Speakers: Driver power: 8 Watts RMS (per channel)

Subwoofer: Driver power: 20 Watts RMS

The Hercules system is the most bare-bones of the four units we checked out,

though you wouldn't know it to listen through your PC. The sturdy subwoofer has a power button, volume and bass knobs on the front, and that's as far as fine-tuning goes without the included software.

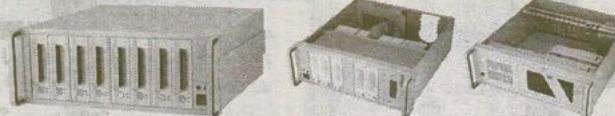
The five satellite speakers are made of plastic but do a good job of reproducing higher end sounds, while the subwoofer takes good care of the bass.

While the Hercules setup has female sound inputs, the system is designed with only PC use in mind. The three ins run to a 5.1 sound card and would require a lot of work and many adapters to convert to home theatre use; too bad really, given that this system's rear satellite speakers have the thinnest and longest wiring of any of the systems tested. ♦

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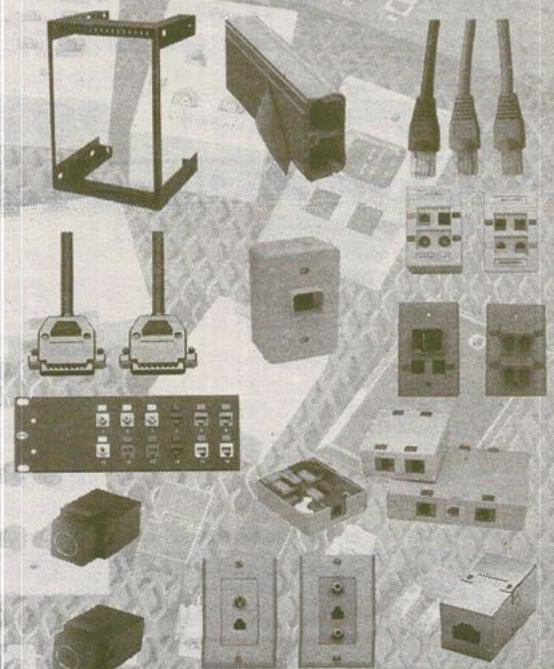
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Moving from paper to Palm

By NESTOR GULA

I have a very eclectic way of staying organized. (Some people would challenge this statement, saying that I'm unorganized, but that's just outside opinion now, ain't it.) I used to rely mainly on my brain. My back-up was a day-timer — (which I frequently used to write things into but rarely used to check) and notes written on diverse scraps of paper, bits of envelopes, torn corners of sheets of paper, and when I still smoked, pieces of cigarette packages and matchbook covers. Since I've been married, I rely on my wife to remember the really critical things. For the most part, I was on time and never forgot to do things. About a year ago, I started having more and more things on my plate and I began carrying more notes around and having briefing sessions with my wife. Realizing that I was probably never going to use a paper day-timer the way it was intended, I decided to go electric and try out a PDA. There are two meanings to the acronym PDA — personal or portable digital assistant. Whatever the case, I decided

to try out the Palm m130 for several reasons, the biggest of which is that it is fully expandable with a host of accessories (like keyboards, wireless modems or Bluetooth adapters) and expansion cards (like the Dictionary/Thesaurus Card, Travel Cards of cities in the U.S., Europe or Asia-Pacific and memory cards.) There's only one Palm that is less expensive and has all the expandability — the monochrome m125. I initially wanted a monochrome Palm because the batteries last longer than in a colour Palm. But after a bit of thought I realized that the colour screen gives a lot more functionality to the PDA. The

and weighs 153 g (5.4 oz.). It has 8 MB of memory and displays thousands of colours at a resolution of 160x160 pixels. Its processing speed is 33 MHz but you are not buying this type of unit for its number crunching capability. It connects to a computer with a USB cable and is compatible with both PCs and Macs, which is great because I use both. It has some interesting software included: *MGI PhotoSuite* for viewing picture files and creating slide shows, as well as *Documents to Go*,



you use the Internet and mobile services on your Palm. You need the optional modem for this, though.

I've been using the Palm for about a month now. I'm still in the honeymoon phase of this experiment. I carry it just about everywhere and

I write most everything down. I also check it quite often. It even has an alarm, which you can activate for events in your date book — it tells you to look at it. It is very easy to use — I was using it for a while before I decided to look at the manual. I find Graffiti (the special way to enter text into you, Palm if you don't want to hunt and peck for letters) pretty easy to use. I have yet to start using the additional software packages and to enter all my addresses and contact info. I can't say it has revolutionized my life, but it has given it a new dimension. ♦

Realizing that I was probably never going to use a paper day-timer the way it was intended, I decided to go electric

m130 also offers a \$100 rebate until Feb. 3 that makes its price a more affordable \$299.99.

The m130 is one of the bigger Palms, at 12.2x7.9x2.3 cm (4.8x3.1x0.9 in.)

which lets the user manipulate *Word*, *Excel* or *PowerPoint* files on the Palm. Colour will come in handy for these applications. There's also an eBook reader and some other software that lets

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Turning students into info scavengers

By HAROLD LASS

Ever been on a scavenger hunt? You know, where you have to race all over the place to be the first to grab all the lunatic loot on your list. Well, WebQuests are the cyber equivalent of a scavenger hunt. While there's no racing or loot involved, that doesn't mean it can't be fun and (here comes that "e" word) educational. The Web is the world's largest virtual community, and through the use of WebQuests, teachers and parents can help students find and explore its treasures.

Interested in leaving Earth? How about an orbital WebQuest? At "A City in Space" (projects.edtech.sandi.net/mission/iss), you begin your quest as a colonist on the International Space Station (ISS). Of course, to qualify for the mission, you must undergo a rigorous orientation program to familiarize you with space. Up there, just opening the wrong hatch could prove fatal. By researching answers to questions in a series of activities, you'll learn a lot about life on the ISS — even down to what meals astronauts eat (like "thermostabilized chicken and irradiated beef enchiladas"). Or, if

distance isn't an issue, you could investigate the possibility of homesteading Mars in 2030 (students.itec.sfsu.edu/itec815_599/mdeschamp/index.html).

But you don't have to leave planet Earth for a worthwhile WebQuest. Canada's a good place to start. Many of us know little about people of Chinese, European and Aboriginal background and their contributions to Canadian culture. At "Preserving, Understanding and Transmitting Canadian Culture" (schools.sd68.bc.ca/coal/pg/canada), you can participate in quests aimed at reducing racism through knowledge of cultures

that make up the Canadian mosaic. Are you aware of the valuable contribution First Nations people made to the construction of roads and railways in early Canada?

WebQuests have recently become a popular tool for teachers and parents to guide student learning on the Internet, and they're easy to construct once you've identified a topic of interest. A quest consists of an introduction (provides some background information about the subject or task), a task (what you hope participants will accomplish by going on the quest), a process (the

steps required to complete the task), resources (a list of Web pages to visit to help complete the task), a conclusion (a reminder of what's been learned on the quest) and an evaluation (for teacher assessment).

If you're having trouble coming up with an introduction or a task, try the included checklist for helpful hints: www.ozline.com/webquests/checklist.html. Teachers will find a template for building their very own WebQuest at www.spa3.k12.sc.us/WebQuestTemplate/webquesttemp.htm. Simply complete it and let the quest begin. ♦

WebQuests have recently become a popular tool for teachers and parents to guide student learning on the Internet



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AMD Duron900		\$339	P4-1.9/2.0/2.4	\$529/539/599	256MB PC-Chips M25 256 MB w/ 128mb pc133	32mb Video & 56K modem (on board)	16X DVD & 48x16x48 CD-Writer	16X DVD & 48x16x48 CD-Writer	16X DVD & 48x16x48 CD-Writer	16X DVD & 48x16x48 CD-Writer	16X DVD & 48x16x48 CD-Writer	16X DVD & 48x16x48 CD-Writer
Duron 1.3G/T.B.1.1G		\$359/369	XP1690/1200/1800	\$369/379/399	XP1690/1200/1800	XP1690/1200/1800	16Bit Sound & Network card (On Board)	16Bit Sound & Network card (On Board)	16Bit Sound & Network card (On Board)	16Bit Sound & Network card (On Board)	16Bit Sound & Network card (On Board)	16Bit Sound & Network card (On Board)
128MB PC-133 SDRAM & Speaker			64M Video & 56K Modem (On Board)		64MB Video & 56K Modem (On Board)	64MB Video & 56K Modem (On Board)	ATX 300W Case & K/B & Mouse & Pad	ATX 300W Case & K/B & Mouse & Pad	ATX 300W Case & K/B & Mouse & Pad	ATX 300W Case & K/B & Mouse & Pad	ATX 300W Case & K/B & Mouse & Pad	ATX 300W Case & K/B & Mouse & Pad
40GB HDD & 1.44M FD & 52X CDROM			16Bit Sound & Network Card (On Board)		16Bit Sound & Network Card (On Board)	16Bit Sound & Network Card (On Board)	Keyboard & MOUSE & Pad	Keyboard & MOUSE & Pad	Keyboard & MOUSE & Pad	Keyboard & MOUSE & Pad	Keyboard & MOUSE & Pad	Keyboard & MOUSE & Pad
16Bit Sound & Network Card (On Board)			ATX MID TOWER CASE 300W		ATX MID Case 300W & Speaker	ATX MidCase 300W & Speaker	change mainboard to P4VXASD2...+\$30	change mainboard to P4VXASD2...+\$30	change mainboard to P4VXASD2...+\$30	change mainboard to P4VXASD2...+\$30	change mainboard to P4VXASD2...+\$30	change mainboard to P4VXASD2...+\$30
Keyboard & MOUSE & Pad			change mainboard to MSI694T-Pro		change mainboard to MSI694T-Pro	change mainboard to MSI694T-Pro	+70	+70	+70	+70	+70	+70
AMD TB 1.1G		\$389	AMD XP 1700	\$539	AMD XP 1700	\$577	AMD XP 1800	\$639	AMD XP 2000	\$699	Intel P4 2.4B	\$999
XP1700/1800/1900		\$419/439/449	XP1800/1900	\$499/559/569	XP1800/1900/2000/2100	\$539/599/609	XP1700/1800/2000/2100	\$612/649/659/683	XP1700/1800/2000/2100	\$659/679/689/729	P4-1.7/1.8G/2G	\$899/919/929
XP2000/2100/2200		\$479/509/609	XP2000/2100/2200	\$559/629/729	XP2000/2100/2200	\$639/669/769	XP2000/2400/2600/2700	\$789/819/979/1069	XP2000/2400/2600/2700/889/959/1019/1109	XP2000/2400/2600/2700/889/959/1019/1109	P4-2.6/2.8/3.0/3.6	\$1149/1309/1519
Duron900/1.3G		\$379/399	ECS K755A		Asus A7S333 MB	Asus A7S333-XL MB	ASUS A7V8X MB (with new USB2.0)	ASUS A7V8X MB (with new USB2.0)	ASUS A7V8X MB (with new USB2.0)	ASUS A7V8X MB (with new USB2.0)	ASUS P4B533 MainBoard	ASUS P4B533 MainBoard
128MB PC-133 sdram & Speaker			256MB PC133 SDRAM		256MB PC-2100 DDR Ram	256MB PC-2100 DDR Ram	256MB PC-2100 DDR Ram	256MB PC-2100 DDR Ram	256MB PC-2100 DDR Ram	256MB PC-2100 DDR Ram	256MB PC-2100 DDR Ram	256MB PC-2100 DDR Ram
32M 4X AGP & 1.44M FD			32M Video Card 4X AGP		32M Video Card 4X AGP	GeForce2 64MB Video Card	GeForce2 64MB Video Card	GeForce2 64MB Video Card	GeForce2 64MB Video Card			
40GB HDD & 52X CD-ROM			40GB HDD & 1.44M FD		40GB HDD & 1.44M FD	40GB HDD & 1.44M FD	40GB HDD & 1.44M FD	40GB HDD & 1.44M FD	40GB HDD & 1.44M FD	40GB HDD & 1.44M FD	40GB HDD & 1.44M FD	40GB HDD & 1.44M FD
16Bit Sound & Network Card (On Board)			16x DVD & 48x16x48 CDRW		16x DVD & 48x16x48 CDRW	16x DVD & 48x16x48 CD-Writer	16x DVD & 48x16x48 CD-Writer	16x DVD & 48x16x48 CD-Writer	16x DVD & 48x16x48 CD-Writer			
56K Modem pci & ATX 300W CASE			16Bit Sound (On Board) & 56k modem		16Bit Sound (On Board) & 56k modem	16Bit Sound (On Board) & 56k modem	16Bit Sound (On Board) & 56k modem	16Bit Sound (On Board) & 56k modem	16Bit Sound (On Board) & 56k modem	16Bit Sound (On Board) & 56k modem	16Bit Sound (On Board) & 56k modem	16Bit Sound (On Board) & 56k modem
Keyboard & Mouse & Pad			ATX MID TOWER CASE 300W		ATX MID Case 300W & Speaker	ATX MidCase 300W & Speaker	Keyboard & Mouse & Pad	Keyboard & Mouse & Pad	Keyboard & Mouse & Pad	Keyboard & Mouse & Pad	Keyboard & Mouse & Pad	Keyboard & Mouse & Pad
change 128PC133 to 256PC133		+30	change 256mb to 512mb	+550	change 256PC133 to 512PC133	change 256PC133 to 512PC133	change mainboard to Asus A7266...+\$40	change mainboard to Asus A7266...+\$40	change mainboard to Asus A7266...+\$40	change mainboard to Asus A7266...+\$40	change mainboard to Asus A7266...+\$40	change mainboard to Asus A7266...+\$40
MONITOR			MAXTOR		ATI tv wonder/usb	96/99	Socket 370 (P3,Celeron)	96/99	Pin 32bit PCI/ 128 PCI	10/12	Intel P4-1.5/2.0/2.4	\$1519/1599/1659
15" NEC1550V/17" NEC1700V		459/759	15" NEC1550V/17" NEC1700V	459/759	111/116	SIS 32B Video Card	25	Houston 758 (vga, audio, modem, lan)	75	TFT/20GB HDD/Lan/Modem		
18" NEC1850E/19" NEC20N		980/1350	18" NEC1850E/19" NEC20N	980/1350	111/116	RAITNT 32 32M 4xAGP	38	MSI 694T-Pro	99	256MB DDR/DVD+CDRW Combo		
15" Samsung 151S white/silver		430/449	15" Samsung 151S white/silver	430/449	125/126	ATI Xpert 128 16M PCI	53	MSI 694T-Pro	132/132	ATI Radeon 9000 128MB DDR		
17" Samsung 171S white/silver		709/710	17" Samsung 171S white/silver	709/710	140/150	ATI a-1-a Radeon7500/retail	175/185	ASUS MidCase 300W & Speaker	178/267	60GB HDD & 4.44 FDD & 10/100 NIC		
18" Samsung 181T/19" 191T		1300/1470	18" Samsung 181T/19" 191T	1300/1470	208/383	ATI a-1-a Radeon7500 64M tv ddr/retail	175/185	ASUS MidCase 300W & Speaker	178/267	16x DVD & 52x24x52 CDRW		
15" Viewsonic VE500/VX500		549/799	15" Viewsonic VE500/VX500	549/799	709/710	SEAGATE (7200rpm)	53/69	ATI Radeon7000 64M tv ddr/retail	175/185	ATX 300W P4 Case & Speaker		
17" LG782L		959	17" LG782L	959	959/960	40GB/60GB/80GB	53/69	ATI Radeon7000 64M tv ddr/retail	175/185	16bit SC (on board) & K/B&Mouse		
17" LEC 770		159	17" LEC 770	159	123/127/147	Western Digital	53/69	ATI Radeon7000 64M tv ddr/retail	175/185	Change MB to P4PE-R-GBL.....+\$70		
17" LG 700S/E700B		168/209	17" LG 700S/E700B	168/209	111/124	40GB 5400rpm/7200rpm	123/127/147	ATI Radeon9000(oem) 64/128	105/133	ECS Laptops*		
17" Samsung 750S/753DF		176/190	17" Samsung 750S/753DF	176/190	150/210/230	40GB 5400rpm/7200rpm	123/127/147	ATI Radeon9000pro(oem) 64/128	107/134	Intel P4-1.5/2.0/2.4	\$1519/1599/1659	
17" ViewsonicE70/E70F		190/229	17" ViewsonicE70/E70F	190/229	132/170/219/539	80/100/120/7200rpm	123/127/147	ATI Radeon9000pro 64/128	107/134	TFT/20GB HDD/Lan/Modem		
17" ViewsonicE75/T75f		282/286	17" ViewsonicE75/T75f	282/286	132/170/219/539	160GB/160GB/400GB	123/127/147	ATI Radeon9000pro 64/128	107/134	256MB DDR/DVD+CDRW Combo		
17" NEC AS75F/FE771		219/257	17" NEC AS75F/FE771	219/257	123/127/147	LG 52"X/Sony 16X DVD	123/127/147	ASUS P4B533/PC4T4533R(r3)	245/260	AMD XP1800/2000	\$1409/1429	
19" Aquaview 9L/S/LG E900B		276/342	19" Aquaview 9L/S/LG E900B	276/342	123/127/147	Artec 16X/LG 16X DVD	123/127/147	ASUS P4B533/PC4T4533R(r3)	245/260	14.1" TFT/20GB HDD/Lan/Modem		
19" Samsung 950B/955DF		276/322	19" Samsung 950B/955DF	276/322	123/127/147	Pioneer 16X tray	123/127/147	ASUS P4B533/PC4T4533R(r3)	245/260	External Floppy Drive	\$59	
19" Viewsonic E90F/G90F		347/389	19" Viewsonic E90F/G90F	347/389	123/127/147	LG 52"X/Sony 16X DVD	123/127/147	ASUS P4B533/PC4T4533R(r3)	245/260	256MB DDR/DVD+CDRW Combo		
19" Viewsonic PFT90/P95F+		490/491	19" Viewsonic PFT90/P95F+	490/491	123/127/147	MSI 16x48" tray	123/127/147	ASUS P4B533/PC4T4533R(r3)	245/260	External Floppy Drive	\$59	
19" NEC AS90/F99/1A95S 292/393		67	19" NEC AS90/F99/1A95S 292/393	67	123/127/147	MSI 16x48" tray	123/127/147	ASUS P4B533/PC4T4533R(r3)	245/260	ASUS P4B533/PC4T4533R(r3)		
19" SONY G410R/G420S		579/619	19" SONY G410R/G420S	579/619	123/127/147	Optrate 48x16x48	123/127/147	ASUS P4B533/PC4T4533R(r3)	245/260	ASUS P4B533/PC4T4533R(r3)		
21" Samsung 1100p/1200NF		689/929	21" Samsung 1100p/1200NF	689/929	123/127/147	Pioneer 48x16x48	123/127/147	ASUS P4B533/PC4T4533R(r3)	245/260	ASUS P4B533/PC4T4533R(r3)		
22" NEC AS120/FE1250+		739/769	22" NEC AS120/FE1250+	739/769	123/127/147	LiteOn 52x24x48 (Retail)	123/127/147	ASUS P4B533/PC4T4533R(r3)	245/260	ASUS P4B533/PC4T4533R(r3)		
22" ViewsonicG810/G220FB		899/1029	22" ViewsonicG810/G220FB	899/1029	123/127/147	Plextor 48x2						

15 Years in Business

550 Alden Rd., Unit #110
Markham, Ontario L3R 6A8
Tel: (905)470-1425 Fax: (905)470-9556

GREY TECH COMPUTER INC.

HARDWARE • SOFTWARE • ACCESSORIES

DIRECTIONS
4 LIGHTS NORTH OF STEELES
1 BLOCK WEST OF FWARDEN
HOURS:
MON. - FRI. 9:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.
SAT. 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

MOTHERBOARDS

SOCKET A (AMD)	
ASUS A7N8X	189
ASUS A7N8X-DX	219
ASUS A7S333-WA	119
ASUS A7V-266-C-WA	109
ASUS A7V-266-E-AA	119
ASUS A7V-333-GD	179
ASUS A7V-333-WA	149
ASUS A7V-333-RAID	189
ASUS A7V-333-X	139
ASUS A7V8X-WL	169
ASUS A7V8X-GBL	209
ASUS A7V8X-L-1394	189
SOCKET 478 (PENTIUM IV)	
ASUS P4BGL-VM-L	149
ASUS P4B533-E-L-R	229
ASUS P4B533-WA	169
ASUS P4B533-V-L	219
ASUS P4B533-VM-L	159
ASUS P4G8X-DX	319
ASUS P4PE-GBL-R	239
ASUS P4PE-L	189
ASUS P4PE-L-R	219
ASUS P4S333-VM-WA	129
ASUS P4S533E-WA-WL	159
ASUS P4S8X-WA-WL-G	209
ASUS P4T533	269
ASUS P4T533-C	249
ASUS P4T533-C-L	259

CASES

GREY-TECH	
MIDTOWER	
GT-4JA6622 (400W / USB)	59
GT-4HL7 (350W)	49

ENLIGHT	
#7237 MID TOWER w/extra fan	59

ANTEC	
MINI	

PLUS660AMG	
PLUS1080AMG	179
PLUS1500B (550W)	209
SLK1600 (300W/USB)	749
SLK2600AMB (300W/USB)	99
SLK3700AMB (350W/USB)	129
FULL TOWER	
PLUS1060 (330W/USB)	199
PLUSVIEW100 (CLEAR)	129
PERFORMANCE SERIES	
SX600II	89
SX1000II	109
SX1040BII (400W/10BAY)	169
SX1400B	599
SX630II (300W/8BAY)	129
SX835II (350W/8BAY)	149

POWER SUPPLY

ANTEC	
SOLUTIONSERIES	
SL350 (350W)	89
SL400 (400W)	99
SL450 (450W)	129
TRUEPOWERSERIES	
TRUE 330 (330W)	89
TRUE 430 (430W)	129
TRUE 480 (480W)	159
TRUE BLUE 480 (480W)	169
TRUE 550 (550W)	189

ENERMAX	
EG365P-VEFMA (350W)	79
EG465P-VE (450W)	109
EG651P-VE (550W)	189

CPU

> ATHLON MP 266MHz	
SOCKET A	
ATHLON MP 2000 (1.67GHz)	259
ATHLON MP 2200 (1.80GHz)	349
ATHLON MP 2400 (2.00GHz)	379
> ATHLON XP 266MHz (RETAIL)	
SOCKET A	
ATHLON XP 1700+TBOEM (1.47GHz)	99
ATHLON XP 1800+TB (1.53GHz)	129
ATHLON XP 2100+TB (1.73GHz)	159
ATHLON XP 2200+TB (1.80GHz)	200
ATHLON XP 2400+TB (2.00GHz)	309
ATHLON XP 2600+TB (2.13GHz)	469
ATHLON XP 2700+TB (2.17GHz)	549

> INTEL 400MHz (RETAIL)	
SOCKET 478	
INTEL CELERON 1.7GHz	99
INTEL CELERON 1.8GHz	129
INTEL CELERON 2.0GHz	149
INTEL CELERON 2.1GHz	159
INTEL CELERON 2.2GHz	189
INTEL P4-1.8AGHz w/512K	249
INTEL P4-2.0AGHz w/512K	279
INTEL P4-2.4AGHz w/512K	339

> INTEL 533MHz (RETAIL)	
SOCKET 478	
INTEL P4-2.4GHz w/512K	339
INTEL P4-2.53GHz w/512K	399
INTEL P4-2.66GHz w/512K	509
INTEL P4-2.8GHz w/512K	639
INTEL P4-3.06GHz w/512K	1069

\$279

Installation not included. 24 pin ATX power required.

SOUND CARDS

CREATIVE LABS	
BLASTER 128 (PCI/OEM)	39
BLASTER LIVE DIGITAL 5.1 (OEM)	59
BLASTER AUDIGY (OEM)	109
BLASTER AUDIGY X-GAMER	139
BLASTER AUDIGY MP3+	139
BLASTER AUDIGY (PCI)	189
BLASTER AUDIGY2 PLATINUM (INT)	269
BLASTER EXTIGY (EXT/USB)	209

AMERICAN POWER UPS

(Backup/Recharge/Power Cap.)

BACK-UPS

BE350U (8/16HR/200W)

10,000RPM

BE500U (11/24HR/300W)

36.6GB (ST-336607LW)

73.3GB (ST-373307LW)

146GB (ST-3146807LW)

18GB (ST-318453LW)

36GB (ST-336753LW)

73.3GB (ST-373453LW)

18GB (ST-318453LW)

SMART-UPS

SUA750XL (50/3HR/600W)

15,000RPM

SUA1000 (20/3HR/670W)

599

SUA1000XL (33/5HR/800W)

1169

SUA1500 (24/3HR/980W)

1699

SU420NET (15/5HR/390W)

179

SU620NET (13/5HR/260W)

329

SU700NET (18/3HR/450W)

509

SU2200NET (32/5HR/1600W)

1249

SU3000NET (18/5HR/2250W)

1829

SOCKET 478

10,000RPM

SOCKET 370

10,000RPM

SOCKET 423

10,000RPM

SOCKET 440

10,000RPM

SOCKET 477

10,000RPM

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SOCKET 5

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SAT. 10:00a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

CD-ROM / CDR/W DRIVES

CD-ROM DRIVES

SONY 52x (EIDE)	39
LG 52x (EIDE)	39
LITE-ON 52x (EIDE)	39
CD RE-WRITERS	
EIDE	
LG GCE-8481BB (48x24x48)	89
LG GCE-8520B (52x24x52)	99
LG GCC-4320B COMBO (32x10x40)	129
LITEON 48246 (48x24x48)	89
LITEON 52246S (52x24x52)	99
PLEXTOR PX-320 COMBO (24x10x40)	229
PLEXTOR W4012 (40x12x40)	159
PLEXTOR W4824 (48x24x48)	169
PLEXTOR W4824TABK (48x24x48)	179
SAMSUNG SM-332 COMBO (32x10x40, 16x DVD)	179
YAMAHA CRWF1EB (44x24x4)	179
YAMAHA CRWF1EVK (44x24x44)	169

EXTERNAL

PLEXTOR (40x12x40, USB 2.0)

YAMAHA CRWFUXVK (44x24x44)

USB 2.0

DVD / RECORDER

EIDE

LG DVD 16X

PIONEER DVD4 16X (TRAY)

SONY 16X DDU162 (TRAY)

JEWEL CASES

SINGLE

DOUBLE

QUAD

DVD-SINGLE

DVD-DOUBLE

CD LABELLING

BRIGHTWHITE (100)

SPEAKERS

INSPIRE 2500

INSPIRE 2600

INSPIRE 4.1 4400

INSPIRE 5.1 5200

INSPIRE 6.1 6600

MEGAWORKS 550

MEGAWORKS 510D

ALTEC LANSING AVS200 (3 SPKS)

ALTEC LANSING AVS300 (3 SPKS)

ALTEC LANSING AVS500 (5 SPKS)

ALTEC LANSING 2100 2.1(2-SUB)

ALTEC LANSING 221CN (2+SUB)

ALTEC LANSING 4100CN (4+SUB)

ALTEC LANSING 4100 (4+SUB)

ALTEC LANSING 621 (2+SUB)

ALTEC LANSING 641CN (4+SUB)

ALTEC LANSING 251CN (4+SUB)

ALTEC LANSING 220CN (4+SUB)

ALTECLANSING XA3001

ALTECLANSING XA3021

ALTECLANSING XA3051

YAMAHA TSS-1

SCSI CONTROLLERS

ADAPTEC

SERVERS & WORKSTATIONS

AVA-2906 (RETAIL)

AHA-2930U (PCI/RETAIL)

FIRECONNECT4300

USB 2.0/1394 CARD

2400A-RAID (EIDE/RETAIL)

19160 KIT (RETAIL)

29160 (RETAIL)

29160 (OEM/CABLE)

29160 (RETAIL)

39160 (RETAIL)

NOTEBOOK

AHA-1350 KIT

AHA-1460 PCMCIA SCSI/CRTL

AHA-1480 PCMCIA SCSI/CRTL

239

FIRECONNECTCARDBUS

139

ULTRA 133

ULTRA TX2-100

FASTRAC 100TX

FASTRAC 100 PRO TX2 KIT

FASTRAC TX2000

FASTRAC TX2000 PRO

SUPERTRAC (SX6000)

SUPERTRAC (SX6000 PRO)

SUPERSWAP 1000

DESK JET / INKJET

HEWLETT PACKARD

HP DESKJET 3420V	99
HP DESKJET 3820V	149
HP DESKJET 5550	189
HP DESKJET CP1700	699
HP DESKJET CP1700D	839
HP DESKJET CP1700PS	849
HP DESKJET 6122	279

MULTI-FUNCTION

HP 2110PSC	289
HP 2210PSC	469
HP 3300MFP	729
HP 3320MFP	919
HP 3320N-MFP	1349
HP 3330MFP	1009
HP D155XI	919
HP D135	579
HP 4100MFP	3099

BROTHER

BROTHER HL-1440	379
BROTHER MFC4800	469
BROTHER MFC6800	649
BROTHER MFC8500	649
BROTHER MFC9700	869
BROTHER 3100C	239
BROTHER 5100C	369
BROTHER MFC7150C	289

EPSON

STYLUS C80N	479
STYLUS C80WN	659
STYLUS 1520	679
STYLUS 3000	1359
STYLUS PHOTO 785EPX	229
STYLUS PHOTO 820	149
STYLUS PHOTO 825	289
STYLUS PHOTO 890	419
STYLUS PHOTO 925	389
STYLUS PHOTO 1280	689
STYLUS PHOTO 2200	1029

MODEMS / PALMTOP

MODEMS

AOPEN	
LINKSYS	

CABLE MODEM WITH USB ETH...

3COM

USR 56K INT V.90 (PCI-HM)	119
USR 56K EXT V.92	139
USR 56K USB VOICE	209
PALMTOPS	
PALM M125	149
PALM M130	369
PALMMS505	379
PALMM515	489
PALMZIRE	159
CASIOBE-300	279
CASIOE-115	488

SCANNERS

HEWLETT PACKARD

HP SCANJET 2300C (8" x 11")	99
HP SCANJET 3500C (8" x 11")	149
HP SCANJET 3570C (8" x 11")	219
HP SCANJET 4570C (8" x 11")	279
HP SCANJET 5500C	429
HP SCANJET 7400C (8" x 14")	649
HP SCANJET 7450C (8" x 14")	899
HP SCANJET 7490C (8" x 14")	1189

CANON

N640PEX	109
D1250U2F	199
5000F	289
8000F	379
LIDE20	109
LIDE30	159

MICROTEK

3800 (8.5" x 11")	109
4800 (8.5" x 11")	139
4900 (8.5" x 11")	229
4900 (8.5" x 11" / 4" x 5")	279
5900 (8.5" x 11" / 4" x 5")	499
6800 (8.5" x 11")	579
8700 (8.5" x 14" / 8" x 10")	1039

DIGITAL CAMERAS

CANON

POWERSHOT A30	CALL
POWERSHOT A40	CALL
POWERSHOT G3	CALL
POWERSHOT S30	CALL
POWERSHOT S230	CALL
POWERSHOT S330	CALL
POWERSHOT S40	CALL

LOGITECH

QUICKCAM PRO 4000	139
DIGITAL CAMERA	159
FIJI	
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Musical Odyssey: Bang the drum electronically

By NESTOR GULA

In last month's column I mentioned that recording a great sound from a bass guitar was the hardest thing to do. A close second is getting a drum sound recorded properly. A good drummer really makes the band work. Interesting percussion will turn a relatively lame piece of music into brilliant art. Percussion is the heartbeat of the gods, capturing this is extremely tricky.

Live drums

Live drums present a standard problem for the home recording studio — they are loud and the various frequencies put out by an energetic drummer will have the whole house shimmying and shaking. If you are insisting on recording a live drummer, or perhaps just some percussion tracks, then experimentation is the key.

The standard layout for a drum kit is to put one microphone in the kick drum and two microphones positioned above the drum kit. Because you are using more than one mike, you will need a mixer to blend the sound of the drums properly. (Incidentally this three-mike

system evolved from the early recording techniques and the standard home recording four-channel tape mixer — you would be able to record the drums on three tracks and then bounce the drums onto the one remaining track.)

The easiest way to get a half-decent sound is to listen to the two overhead mikes first, repositioning them as needed for a good sound. Once you have an acceptable sound you can turn up the mike in the kick drum to a level you find decent. If you are blessed with a large mixing board and a plethora of mikes, you should point one at the snare and then try to point the others at the toms. This all depends on how many mikes you have and how many channels your mixer has. When mixing with many mikes you should start with the overhead mikes as well, bringing up the individual mikes for flavour.

If you are just recording some rhythm patterns on a set of tablas, bongos, djembe or even Tupperware, then you will spend a lot of time experimenting with a proper mike setup to get a nice sound for your recording. I had a set of Roto-Toms for a while and I had a devil of a time getting a good sound out of them. I even-

tually grew tired of the constant setup I had to do to record a track and traded them in — for a drum machine.

Drum machine

I used to be morally opposed to drum machines — I thought that it was musical cheating and provided uninspired and repetitive drumming for music. I checked my pride in one day and played around with one at a store, and then traded the above-mentioned Roto-Toms in to buy such a machine.

Drum machines are great for the home recorder. Not only do they not make any noise (unless hooked up to an amp), they require no complex microphone setup. Some of them have individual outs so you can vary the mix between individual drum sounds. This is similar to miking a real drum set, except that you will not get the overhead mikes giving you the rich sound of the complete drum kit. When using a drum machine, you will have to play with effects like equalization, reverb and chorus to get the warmth of the sound. These effects will come from external effect units or from your recording software itself. Most drum machines have MIDI, so you can trigger

the drum machine using your computer's recording software.

Loops

Loops are patterns that are repeated in music. Far from being a new concept, looping was used by experimental musicians for many years. The difference was they used tape loops and complex technology. Loops now are easy to record and store on your computer's hard disk. You can buy literally thousands of drum loops that you can incorporate into your music. Each drum loop is like a drum pattern. You can repeat it ad infinitum or blend it with another drum loop or loops to create really cool syncopations.

As with miking a live drum kit, recording electronic drums, either from a drum kit or loops, is an experimental process. Approaching this as a fun learning experience is the best way to get excellent results. ♦



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Adventures in digital video: Golden rules and mean screens

By LEE RICKWOOD

In our last adventure, some "rules" were described that can help you make more attractive and engaging digital video images.

The idea is not to blindly adhere to the rule, of course, but to understand it, apply it when needed and to break it when you have a creative reason to do so.

The Rule of Thirds, described last time, sets down guidelines for image composition, that's all. It points out that certain areas of any image provide a strong anchor point for our eyes, one that can be ignored or implemented at will. The rule is based on centuries of artistic – and mathematic – precedent should not be ignored.

TV screens can't be divided perfectly into three, so the rule, no matter how tried and true, can't be followed exactly.

Which is good – again, the rule is really a guideline. If you have a good reason for not following it, well, don't. The best image is not only the one that follows the rules; it's often the one that

serves the purpose, the one that meets your needs, the one that "feels right."

But if nothing feels just right, that's when remembering the Rule can help. It does have a solid foundation, one that goes back centuries.

That foundation is called the Golden Mean, or Golden Section, and it refers to those proportions or ratios most pleasing to the human eye, whether for emotional, aesthetic or cosmological reasons. Images or constructions that follow the Golden Mean are intrinsically pleasing, and artists and architects since ancient Greek and Roman times have sought to capitalize on the visually comfortable nature of the Golden Mean.

TV screens have not. They seem sized

according to criteria other than "conforming."

Just so you know, the Golden Mean is represented by the Greek letter phi, and the decimal representation of phi is 1.6180339887499 ...

It's close, but not exactly the decimal representation for our old friend, the TV screen: 4:3 = 4/3 or 1.333 ... is its aspect ratio. Widescreen or letter-boxed images, also known as 16:9, are close, but still no cigar: 16/9 = 1.777...

Of course, digital video only complicates matters. Its technical specifications (ITU-601, formerly CCIR) designate a DV pixel format of 720x480, or a ratio of approximately 1.5. The standard CCIR 601 specification, 720x486, works out to roughly 1.481481 ...

Interestingly, with so many popular media display formats not conforming to the Golden Mean, there is some speculation that because we so rarely see it these days, we may in fact be losing our affinity for the perfect ratio.

If you're not numbered-out by now, there is plenty of additional information

on the Web about the Golden Mean, aspect ratios, television screen formats and by implication, how absolutely unrelated TV is to any aesthetic consideration of visual proportions.

Next time, I promise, no history, no math – just more adventures in digital video, and how creativity can beat bad proportions every time. ♦

more INFO

For more information about the Golden Mean, geometry, aspect ratios, and image displays, visit the following Web sites:

A Quick Guide to DV Resolution and Aspect Ratio Conversion:
www.uwasa.fi/~f76998/video/conversion/

Information on Multimedia Data Representations:
www.cs.sfu.ca/undergrad/CourseMaterials/CMPT479/material/notes/Chap3/Chap3.html

The Golden Mean and Elements of Design:
www.tcm.mit.edu.au/notes/GoldenMean/golden1.htm

The Golden Mean and other related topics:
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Text messages come to car radios



By SUE BOWNESS

If you're the type of driver who appreciates traffic reports on the radio but would rather listen to rock than talk, you may be interested in radioText (www.radiotext.ca), a new technology that provides an alternative to flipping between stations. By taking over the display screen on your car radio, where station call letters usually appear, radioText technology turns this important dashboard space into an information hub, providing breaking news about traffic, weather, headlines and even song titles.

With 200,000 cars in the Greater Toronto Area already equipped to receive the radioText signal, and General Motors currently pre-installing the specialized receiver in 75 per cent of its new cars, radioText has seen increased popularity in Canada over the last few years. Yet the technology itself is hardly new — by now the receiver required to access radioText is almost standard in Europe, where the technology was developed almost 20 years ago to convey traffic information.

In Canada, radioText owes its advancement and growing popularity in large part to a Toronto-based company called E-radio. Founded in 1999 by Jackson Wang and Jason Chang, E-radio has spent the past four years promoting radioText not only to consumers, but also to broadcasters. The company has managed to persuade several Toronto stations to support the new technology, with Q107, Edge102, CHUM FM, Y108, Kiss 92, CHFI, Energy 93.1 and Country 95.3 all carrying radioText messages. Beyond the GTA, Barrie's 103.1, CHAY and Windsor's 93.9 are also involved.

Their participation means that radioText receivers will display station-specific information about the current song's title and artist, in addition to the latest headlines and weather reports.

Getting a closer look

The radioText screen is larger than you might imagine, certainly with more room than the standard radio's display space. In fact, the radioText screen can vary in dimension from a smaller version measuring 2.5x12.7 cm (1x5 in.) to the more deluxe 8.9x12.7 cm (3.5x5 in.) display with touch screen programming. Though the messages are continuously updated, the driver must press a button on the display in order to access them, so that the text does not accidentally divert the driver's attention from the road. As you might imagine, the distraction factor has been one of the greatest sources of hesitation for installing the system in an already busy dashboard.

As far as content goes, the messaging sequence is consistent between both display sizes and is station-specific as well. Each 64-character radioText message is displayed for one minute continuously, and rotates through a cycle of four constantly updated segments: A "Now Playing" segment containing artist and title information on the current song, a "Breaking News" segment containing information like headlines or sports scores, a "Public Service" segment with weather and traffic details, and of course a one minute advertising segment.

Besides the rotating messages, radioText adjusts the standard radio display so that the proper station name appears (for example, 102.1 will display as "The Edge") as well as the type of

music (ie. rock), which is handy for deciphering the genres available when visiting a new city. When travelling from one city to another, the receiver will also adjust the station reception based on the geographic location. For example, if a driver is listening to the CBC in Toronto and driving towards London, the station will switch over to the London CBC when the Toronto signal becomes weak.

The receiver's geographic sensitivity and other features rely on an underlying technology called Radio Data System (RDS), which effectively piggybacks on the FM band in order to receive signals. Yet in both Europe and North America, the industry is already advocating a move towards the more autonomous Digital Audio Broadcast (DAB) technology, which operates on a different frequency and uses MPEG2 data reduction, allowing for a faster signal transmission (you may recognize DAB as the frequen-

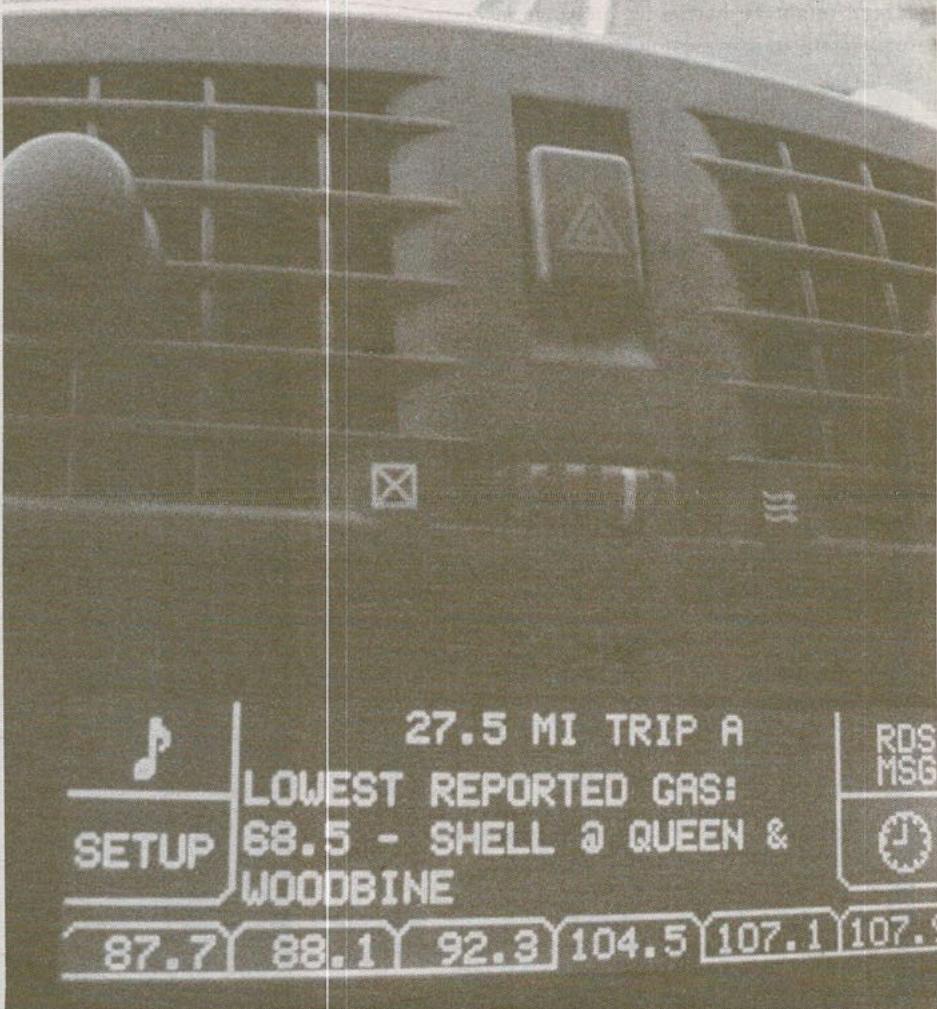
cy generally touted to replace FM). E-radio and other advocates anticipate that this technology will soon become the standard for radioText, and indeed DAB receivers are set to be installed in 2003 vehicles.

Witnessing radioText for the first time, you realize it is one of those "why didn't we think of this before" technologies. Not only does the Now Playing display end the guesswork in trying to find out the name of that great new song playing on your way to work, but having the option to access practical, relevant information at the touch of a button just makes sense.

In keeping with the theory that a more informed driver is a better driver, radioText is definitely a technology worth considering.

E-Radio itself now offers retrofitting of the radioText receivers onto existing systems. ♦

As you might imagine, the distraction factor has been one of the greatest sources of hesitation for installing the system in an already busy dashboard.



Digital Words: Adobe PDF and a printer's paradise

By JEFF CHAPMAN

Until quite recently, publishers and printers were accustomed to dealing with "hard copies" of documents. While the desktop publishing technology of the '80s and '90s had allowed many independent publishers to prepare and print out their originals themselves, the whole business was decidedly primitive. Small publishers printed out their publications at home, using whatever printers were available, and then stuffed those precious originals into envelopes and carried them over to the print shop or copy shop, where their originals were entrusted to the strangers behind the counter, who would do their best to produce reasonably true copies.

Add flaws here ... and here ... and here

Every non-digital step of the process introduced new opportunities for imperfection. Since few home users had access to high-resolution laser printers, the publication's image quality was often halved by the time it was transferred from the screen to the page. In those all-too-common cases where the would-be publisher was compelled to rely on some half-dead, low-resolution, low-on-ink bubble jet printer to produce the originals, the publication that had looked so good on the screen might be barely legible on paper. Any smears, stains, folds, tears, cat hairs or toner-stained fingerprints the publication happened to pick up on its way from the printer to the print shop were there to stay. And if the precious originals were torn in the process of copying — and they always were — the horrific cycle would begin again, as the publisher was compelled to produce and deliver a new set of originals.

Those who could afford to use professional print shops instead of heading over to Kinko's had the option of trying to supply their material in digital form as a massive collection of document files and images. This worked, providing the publisher and the printer were

both using the same version of the same publishing program, running on the same platform, had all the same versions of the same typefaces installed and the publisher's monitor was perfectly calibrated to the print shop's output device. Unfortunately, this never happened, particularly since most home users use PCs and most print shops use Macs, and since home users tend to use free or cheap typefaces and print shops tend to use professional, expensive typefaces. The results the print shops came up with often looked a little different from what the small publisher had in mind, necessitating time-consuming and sometimes expensive rounds of proofs and corrections.

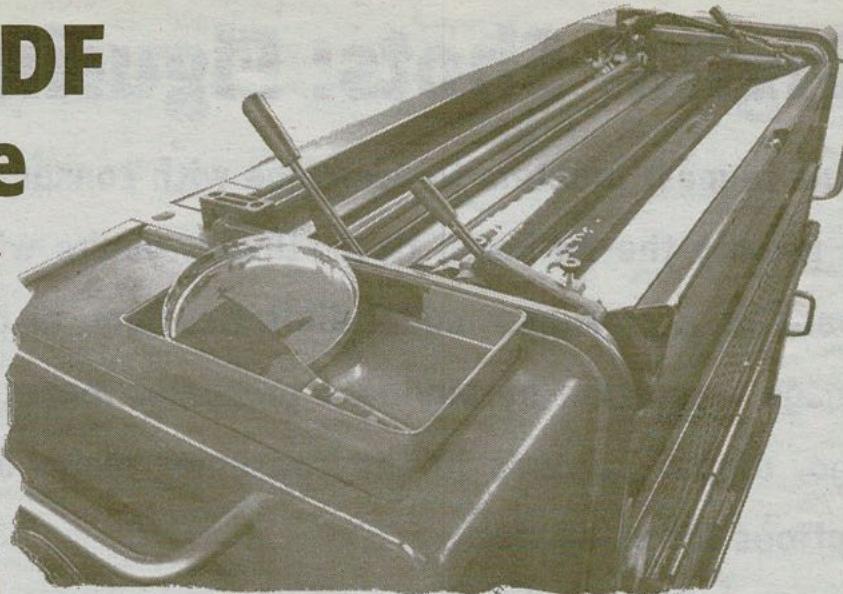
PDF to the rescue

While most people probably still think of it as an annoyingly slow browser plug-in forced upon them by lazy webmasters, *Adobe Acrobat's* Portable Document Format (PDF) can be put to good use by small publishers. Adobe's format is basically a highly compressed Encapsulated Post Script (EPS) file — it strips out all the information that isn't needed and leaves only the mathematical instructions necessary to reproduce a given document on a specified output device — and it can be viewed and outputted by both PC and Mac users with the free and widely available *Acrobat Reader* utility from Adobe. While one does need to purchase and install the full version of *Adobe Acrobat* in order to create PDFs, it isn't necessary to use Adobe desktop publishing software like *PageMaker* or *InDesign*; any program that can output EPS files (that is, almost every desktop publishing or technical illustration program on the market) can be used to make PDF files. Adobe isn't keeping this very useful technology to itself; indeed,

the latest version of *QuarkXPress*, the main competitor to *Adobe InDesign*, has a PDF export command built right into its file menu.

To create PDF files, one simply loads a component of *Adobe Acrobat* called "Distiller," specifies certain basic output settings (resolution, colour or black and white, etc.) and feeds it an EPS file, which is then stripped to its bare essentials and converted into a PDF file. The entire publication — including all formatting, text, images and typefaces — is then rendered as a single PDF file, which fits on a single CD-R and might even be small enough to simply e-mail to the print shop.

The beauty of PDF files is that what appears on the creator's screen will bear a very strong resemblance to what comes out of the print shop's high-resolution output device. Colour matching still isn't flawless, unfortunately, but the embedded fonts, images, special characters, margins and so forth will all be reproduced exactly the same on two different machines, even on two different platforms, and what appears on paper will match what is on the screen as closely as possible. By putting off the conversion of a document into analogue format until the last possible moment — the creation of the finished product by the high-quality output devices — small publishers can achieve much higher resolutions and more professional-looking results. ♦



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Digital Shots: Figuring out flash

The biggest problem to overcome with consumer level digital cameras is usually the on-board flash. Unless you're willing to drop over a grand on a prosumer model digital camera, or to sacrifice overall image resolution by buying a prosumer model from a few years ago, digital cameras in the consumer realm don't give you many options for using flash.

By ANDREW MOORE-CRISPIN

Most digital cameras with on-board flash give menu options for flash firing mode, but given the location of the flash – usually, directly above the lens or offset to the left or right above the lens – there is little flexibility, even with the flash modes cameras offer.

That said, the flash modes contained within the menus can help you to take better pictures without buying extra equipment or upgrading your digital camera.

Auto

This mode is best for snapshots and pictures where the subject matter is more important than the composition; for example, quick photos of family and friends taken to document time spent together rather than for visual impact. These are the kinds of photos we've all seen in countless family photo albums.

Auto flash mode takes most of the guesswork out of taking a picture and, as the name implies, will automatically make the selection of the best possible flash mode for a given situation.

However, it pays to be familiar with the other flash modes, as Auto mode decides how to fire based on overall light, the key subject's distance from the lens and shutter speed and aperture. The key subject in most digital cameras is defined as the object in the centre of the frame, which, as we have discussed in conversations about the rule of thirds (dividing the frame into thirds vertically and horizontally and placing subjects where these lines intercept as opposed to centering them in the frame), doesn't lend itself to very interesting images.



Auto flash usually works well to give a balanced overall image, but doesn't have the capability for judgment that the person behind the lens has.

Fill flash

Fill flash is used in harsh lighting conditions where the light source, most often the sun, is casting harsh shadows

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on the subject, like a face. Fill flash will cast light in dark areas, like under the nose, eyes and mouth, and is intended to give a more even light to the image.

The mistake many amateur photographers make is to assume that flash is used to brighten up a scene that lacks sufficient light. While this is a key function of flash, it's not the only application. Try using fill flash to give pictures a more even light quality and soften up shadows in harsh lighting conditions.

Slow Synchro

Slow Synchro flash mode is much as it sounds; the shutter will stay open longer (usually around 1/4 second) to gather more ambient light from the background, while the flash fires to illuminate objects in the foreground. Think of taking a picture on a balcony at night, overlooking a city skyline. The flash will do nothing to illuminate the background elements, so a fast shutter speed would lose all background detail. Instead, the flash acts as the shutter for the foreground, while the background gets a bit longer to expose.

Red-eye reduction

Red-eye occurs when the light from a flash bounces off the blood vessels in the retina and gives your subject that demonic look that is sometimes hard to

avoid. Red-eye reduction flash will fire a few short bursts before actually taking the picture, to dilate the subject's pupil and minimize the light bouncing back to the camera. Try to avoid this setting, as it is only a band-aid solution and usually creates more confusion with people moving out of the frame before the picture is taken. Instead (or as well as), avoid having the subject look directly at the lens (and hence the flash), or position a slave flash off to either side of the camera, which brings me to my next point.

shoe or flash synchronization ports, all is not lost.

Off-camera flashes can be had in many dedicated photography stores for about \$150 for an intermediate level flash that can grow with you and provide the flash flexibility that consumer digital cameras often sorely miss. These adjustable flashes give users much more control on how the light from the flash is to be delivered, but also require a bit more attention in order to get a good end product. We won't go into the details of setting up a slave flash in this

the end of a flash synchronization cord. The slave senses when your on-camera flash fires, and will trigger the second, off camera flash to fire.

Slave flash presents a special case in digital, as the primary flash will attempt to illuminate the whole scene, which means photographers must pay more attention to getting the setup correct; using a subdued slave flash setting will give a balanced light quality in most situations. Another option is to use light masking tape (electrical tape works well) to position a peanut slave right in front of the on-camera flash. This will avoid many of the problems with overexposure and is essentially a hot shoe or synchronization port alternative. After setting up a slave flash, it's just a matter of configuring it correctly for the situation.

As with all photography, much of the learning process is trial and error; using a slave to fire a second flash can potentially result in an over-lit, washed out image, similar to the lighting effects used in the music videos of ageing divas to hide wrinkles and other "imperfections" of the skin.

Since we don't have to pay for our mistakes in digital photography, keep experimenting until you get a result you're happy with; it's all part of the fun and part of the reason we went digital in the first place. ♦

Since we don't have to pay for our mistakes in digital photography, keep experimenting until you get a result you're happy with

Slave flash

Some more advanced consumer level digital cameras have either a hot shoe mount or flash synchronization port that can be used in conjunction with or instead of the camera-mounted flash. Having an adjustable flash can help a lot in getting a balanced and even picture that on-camera flash just doesn't have the flexibility to provide. However, if your digital camera is without the hot

column, as this information is usually well explained in the flash instruction manual, online and in many beginner- and intermediate-level photography books.

Assuming your digital camera doesn't have a hot shoe or flash synchro port, you will also need a photo slave. The smaller of these light sensitive diodes are usually no bigger than a cufflink — often called peanut slaves — and fit on

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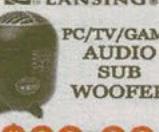
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Baby Einstein comes to the PC

By MARA GULENS

Although I have three kids under the age of five, *Baby Newton Fun With Shapes* is my first introduction to the massively successful Baby Einstein Company product line.

The line covers everything you can think of to stimulate and entertain children four years old and under, including videos, books, audio CDs, discovery cards, puppets and now, a PC "game." (That's game in quotes, since it's intended for kids one and up).

As the company's Web site explains, Baby Einstein products expose kids to "music, art, language, science and nature in playful, enriching ways." My sister's kids have the Baby Mozart video. Funny, given all the success, that we've never viewed it during the numerous visits to their house.

But back to the game. From what I gather, it's very similar to the other products in that it also takes simple shapes and concepts and maps them to music to provide the youngest of kids with a rich learning experience. Since I'm not familiar with the

line (which, I gather from testimonials, leaves kids spellbound), I'll talk about the interactive CD-ROM in terms of itself.

The game begins with an install process that lets you choose between English and French. Curiously, that only applies to the install process itself, because the game is in English only.

Once in, the voice comes on and says "Baby Einstein." (I almost had a conniption when my 20 month-old daughter repeated the word "Einstein," clear as a bell). Baby Newton, the lion, I presume, then guides kids through various colourful landscapes, including the seashore and downtown, as various objects (pizza and cheese, for example) pop up to introduce kids to circles, squares, triangles and rectangles.

If the kids just sit by the computer, the images sort of move around, but the story doesn't progress. If they tap the

space bar, the game goes on to the next scene. And this, in effect, is what this interactive CD-ROM is all about. A TV doesn't allow kids to do anything but watch and listen. The PC version lets kids watch, listen and click.

When our first child hit the age of one, we were very keen to let her have a go at the computer, and a shareware program similar to *Baby Newton Fun With Shapes* provided colours and shapes that exploded on the screen. But the music was cheap computer gibberish, and it wasn't much more than an opportunity to bang away at the keyboard.

Baby Newton Fun With Shapes, on the other hand, has unobtrusive Vivaldi in the background. Vivaldi, like Mozart, most likely has the same magical, mathematical properties that stimulate learning and development. But most parents already know that, and that's why we don't put kids to bed with heavy metal music, continue buying all those cuddly rainbow-coloured baby products and

read books to our children.

Baby Newton Fun With Shapes takes the tried and true elements from the other products – the books, the videos and the CDs – as well as the convincing arguments that New Age parents go for, and puts them together in an interactive CD-ROM.

You can take this medium or leave it. But once your child has had a go at *Baby Newton*, you better bet it'll be hard to stop them from toddling towards the computer chanting "Einstein..." ♦

more INFO

Baby Newton Fun With Shapes

\$29.99

Disney Interactive

www.babyeinsteinkids.com; www.disneyinteractive.com

For kids 12 months and up

Requirements:

Pentium 166 MHz or faster, Windows 95/98/ME, 8x CD-ROM drive, 32 MB RAM, 60 MB free hard disk space, 16-bit DirectX-compatible sound card, 16-bit colour, DirectX-compatible 4 MB video card

Kidproof your computer files

By MARA GULENS

Like anything to do with computers and kids, it all starts with the two P's: Proper PC Usage and Parental Supervision. Listen to the sage advice of Myles Kesten, president of the CD-ROM Store.

One of the new features of Windows XP (which comes with new PCs) is that it "allows individual users to be set up with passwords and protects all the settings of other users," says Kesten. This means that Little Joe will in a sense be working on his own version of the computer and won't be able to mess with what dad has set up.

For people paranoid of their children deleting files, Kesten recommends the following:

- *Raxio GoBack*: This utility mirrors hard disk activity and allows users to go back in time if a major deletion, corruption or virus has occurred.
- *Norton Ghost*: This utility mirrors and backs up the hard disk on a separate back up media, such as a second hard disk, a Zip drive or a CD-writer.
- *Read the Read Me files* that accompany new software. They often come with useful last minute information.

If you're encountering problems with games you've purchased, check out Kesten's tips at www.cdromstore.com (go to Software and Hardware Tips/Reviews). ♦

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Good times at Mac love-in

Macworld post-show report

By DAVID TANAKA

It was, according to a fellow Canadian journalist we bumped into — and a seasoned writer on things Apple — a pretty good Macworld. We'd concur. In a post-show news release, organizer IDG World Expo stated that 90,473 people attended and more than 330 companies participated in the Jan. 6-10 event, now in its 19th year.

During his keynote address to a full house at the Moscone Center in San Francisco, Apple CEO Steve Jobs gave his usual Apple versus that other platform state of the union address, but then launched into a series of new product announcements covering both hardware and software. With the announcement of two new PowerBooks, he claimed that Apple has the biggest and smallest full-featured notebooks on the planet. In a separate briefing, *TC!* met with Apple product managers who let us play touchie-feelie with a couple of units. Our impression of the 17-inch PowerBook: Wow! We initially feared that the 17-inch widescreen display would make the unit lid-heavy, but it seemed to be well balanced, and at about 3 kg (just under 7 lb.), very light given its dimensions.

Among the new software Jobs announced during his keynote were a repackaging of *iPhoto*, *iTunes*, *iMovie* and *iDVD* into a product called *iLife*, which will ship with all new Macs. But this is not mere cosmetic repackaging, said Jobs. The applications have all been rewritten to be more interoperable.

A couple of brand-new products surfaced: *Safari*, which is an OS X-only Web browser, and *Keynote*, a presentation package that Jobs said he'd used for all his keynote presentations in 2002. We've downloaded the beta version of *Safari*, and initial impressions are that it is speedy, although we can't confirm that it's three times as fast as *Internet Explorer*, which Apple claims it is. But the simplified interface is very attractive. Notable features in *Safari* are a built-in Google, a SnapBack button that takes you back to the original entry point of a search (also works with the URL navigation bar), and a customizable favourites bar that you can load up with your favourite Web site addresses.

Pocketbook-challenged video producers will be happy to know that Apple also introduced *Final Cut Express*. This is *Final Cut Pro* with some of the advanced professional features removed, and with a price tag of \$450.

On the floor

The 300-plus exhibitors that took part in the trade show portion covered the full gamut of personal computing. As one might expect, there were a lot of products devoted to Internet and multimedia production, although on the flight back, we talked to one chap who works for a Markham company that has developed a CRM (customer relations management) application for OS X.

Winnipeg-based Mac developer, eZedia Inc. (www.ezedia.com), announced a couple of new products at the show: *eZemotion* for *iMovie* and *eZediaQTI*.

eZemotion is a plug-in for *iMovie*, and allows users to animate elements such as text and graphics along a path and layer it over video. *eZediaQTI* is a *QuickTime* authoring environment that allows a developer to establish interaction points or object animation paths and then export the production to an interactive *QuickTime* movie format.

ThinkFree Corp., of Cupertino Calif. (www.thinkfree.com), was showing its *MS Office*-compatible *ThinkFree Office* suite, which can be downloaded for US\$49.95. The suite has *Write*, *Calc* and *Show*, which are compatible with *Word*, *Excel* and *PowerPoint*. The unusual feature of this product is that it is written in Java, so that it will run on OS X, OS 8.6 or above and Windows. We tried the software on an iBook and found it more sluggish than *Word*, but we could go back and forth on the same document with the two word processors with no problems.

When we asked a representative from MacSpeech Inc., of Bedford, New Hampshire (www.macspeech.com), what distinguished its *iListen* voice dictation software from *IBM ViaVoice*, he laughed and said "*iListen* works." *iListen* allows dictation directly into most applications, plus command and control.

U.K. developer DrawWell Technologies



Ltd. (www.drawwell.com) was showing an OS X desktop publishing and illustration package called *WorksWell* (US\$99).

Rain Design, of San Francisco (www.igo4mac.com), showed two workstations dedicated to the new iMac. These are very cool designs, looking a bit like plant stands, with chrome legs converging to a small pedestal just big enough to hold the circular iMac base. A separate platform holds the keyboard, mouse and speakers. ♦

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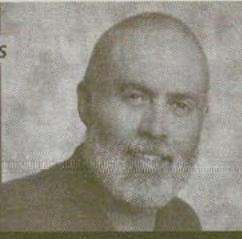
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CP February 2003

Alan Thwaits

The
World
Is My
Cubicle

Some Spammish thoughts ...

Spam's been getting a lot of press for quite a while now. Not surprising, I guess, since it happens to all of us. It's been one of the unlooked-for consequences of the ubiquity of the Internet. Sure, we can e-mail Grandma in Hoboken, connect with tiddliwink sites in Japan and download images that are graphic in more ways than one. And let's not forget that the Net is one of the tools that's used to the fullest by the military mucky-mucks of nation-states all around the globe, both the White Hats and the Black Hats. The Internet is great.

But who would have thought that the miracle of global communication would have brought spam to everyone's virtual doorstep? It's here, though, and it's ours, so we might as well get to know it. Herewith, some history, some reflection and a burning question or two from your friendly correspondent on the subject of spam.

Spam, the real stuff, was invented in 1927 in Minnesota. The "distinctive chopped pork shoulder and ham mix-

ture" was developed by Jay C. Hormel, son of George A. Hormel, the founder of the Hormel Company, and was originally marketed as "Hormel Spiced Ham." The name was changed to "Spam" after a contest was initiated by Hormel to counter the efforts of imitators.

In 1937, a version of Spam was developed that needed no refrigeration. That's when sales really took off. Spam became an essential part of the rations of American soldiers in World War II. Years later, Nikita Kruschev credited Spam with the survival of the Russian Army during the same conflict.

Not content with invading the stomachs of the public, Hormel also saw to it that the stuff got into people's heads. In 1940, Spam was the subject of the first singing commercial heard on radio. The jingle was sung to the tune of the chorus of "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean." For those whose curiosity is insatiable, the lyrics were "Spam, Spam, Spam/Hormel's new miracle meat in a can/Tastes fine, saves time,/ If you want something grand,/ Ask for Spam!"

Fast forward a couple of decades. In the second series of *Monty Python's*

Flying Circus, the Pythons "celebrated" the famous luncheon meat in their now-legendary Spam skit.

The skit takes place in a cafe. At one table are a number of Vikings, all wearing horned helmets. A man (Eric Idle) and his wife (Graham Chapman, in drag) enter the cafe and sit at a neighbouring table. The waitress (Terry Jones, also in drag) offers various menu choices, all of which involve Spam. Whenever she mentions the word, the Vikings sing or chant in response. Typical Python craziness, but its success hinged on Spam's notoriety. (You can hear the original skit, via streaming RealAudio, at www.detritus.org/spam/skit.html)

The line from the skit that echoes in the minds of present-day Internet users is the wife's plaintive cry, "I don't want ANY Spam!"

No ma'am, and nor do we. But it pours into our mailboxes, day after day. It's about mortgage rates and inkjet printer cartridge offers that can't be beat. It's about offers to modify the size of various body parts. It even comes in the form of flattering messages direct from Nigerian bankers, or the wives of

recently-deposed dictators, who need our help to get back on their feet again. It's annoying, time-consuming and sometimes downright offensive.

But you know what? Internet spam isn't really very different from a lot of the other nonsense that comes into my personal space. I didn't ask the landscape to be littered with billboards touting the latest and baddest SUV or the hair colour that's going to optimize my sex life. I didn't ask that some near-adolescent telemarketer interrupt my peaceful evening with his unctuous, grasping questions. It's all an invasion of my space, and it's all repugnant.

So why is all the fuss being made on spam? Because it's new? Because it comes via the Internet, the media's favourite whipping-boy? Or is it simply because spam hasn't – yet – become the vehicle of big, socially-approved corporations? If it's the latter, then heaven help us – things are only going to get worse.

Alan Thwaits, a *TC!* Contributing Editor, is a freelance journalist who writes about computer, communications, and business technologies. He can be reached at praxis@pathcom.com. ♦

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I like being on the trailing edge of technology. Back when I first started with computers, I loved being on the leading edge. There is a big difference between the two, and each position has its advantages and disadvantages. However, I've now decided that the trailing edge is for me.

Go with a winner

If you are on the trailing edge of technology, you already know what has been successful and what has crashed and burned. History shows that trailing-edgers can save a lot of headaches and money; just recall the famous VHS versus Beta wars of the early 1980s. Did you rush out and buy Beta or did you wait and put your money on VHS? After a good chunk of time, my family went with VHS. And just before Christmas last year, I finally joined the 1990s and bought a DVD player.

Or how about a handheld computer? Did you buy an Apple Newton or did

The joys of the trailing edge

you wait for Palm and Pocket PC to revolutionize the industry? I love my Palm IIIc. Sure, it is not as flashy as the latest Palm Tungsten or the Sony NR70, and I don't get to brag to my friends. However, it does the job very well and I know what accessories are available.

Save money

A big reason for sticking with the trailing edge is that your purchase prices are always lower.

I picked up a digital camera attachment for my Palm for less than 40 per cent of its regular retail price, and a Palm folding keyboard for my wife's Palm III for only \$25. I recently doubled the RAM in my old 486 notebook for less than \$40. Sure, the Palm III's are no longer being made and my notebook was discontinued years ago, but surplus stock abounds if you have the time and patience to find it.

If you've perused the ads in this issue of *Toronto Computes!*, you will notice that many stores now focus on clearance items or older stock. Some items are available at an incredible bargain. Ever want a notebook? You can buy one for less than \$500.

Honest reviews abound

Another advantage of the trailing edge is you can get a better feel for the performance and reliability of products based on others' experiences. By talking to friends, relatives or reading postings on the Internet, it is fairly straightforward to obtain reviews and opinions. Need help getting that older accessory working? A quick visit to Google may be all you need to ensure happiness. A problem I find with the leading edge is that much of the media wants to sugar-coat how great a product is. End-user reviews are always the way to go, and you only get those once a product has been on the market for a while.

Support

You also have an advantage of excellent hardware and/or software support and you can almost always ensure compatibility with trailing edge technology. For example, if you bought the leading-edge Palm Tungsten PDA, you will quickly find that you can only acquire a few accessories for it, and not much software is available to take advantage of its new features.

Those who installed Windows XP over

Windows 98 may have been in for a surprise when they learned that some of their hardware was not supported. Besides, I don't care if Windows XP doesn't support my hardware, because I am still running Windows 98SE without any problems and don't need to upgrade.

Trailing-edge thoughts

I used to be on the leading edge and poked fun at people who were stuck on the trailing edge. But as time went on, I have found myself mired on the trailing edge of technology. If you focus on slightly older technology, you don't need the up-to-date software support that comes with the latest-and-greatest. You have a lot of support from other sources such as friends and the Internet, and most computer users are smart enough to handle any little problems on their own.

I really like being able to buy surplus items at (what I consider are) great prices, and I personally can't afford to purchase a new PC every 6 months or so.

Personal e-mail to Kevin Linfield, P.Eng. can be sent to linfield@rocketmail.com. ♦

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The easiest
Way to zip
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StuffIt
DELUXE

By DAVE CHAPPELLE

Transferring large files, especially huge audio and video files, is sometimes difficult. And if the transfer is between Mac and Windows systems, beware. While Mac users have been using *StuffIt* for years, Windows folks have been compressing with *WinZip*. *StuffIt* Deluxe for Windows has been around for a while, and the new version features new components and works for other operating systems too.

California-based Aladdin Systems makes this file compression and encryption application. *StuffIt* is available as a download over the Web or as a boxed CD.

The instruction manual is pretty thin, concerned only with installing the application. To find out how to use the program you could stumble around a bit on your own, but we found the help file to be better than many. Even if you've used *WinZip* before, you'll appreciate the tutorials. If you're unfamiliar with terms like archive and compress, definitions are also in the help section.

When you open *StuffIt* Deluxe, it automatically wants to open an Internet connection. Like many programs we're familiar with, explanatory tips also open in a separate window. More tips can be viewed or accessed at any time from the help menu.

StuffIt designers have made the interface with three panes, similar to that of Windows Explorer. You can choose to archive files, archive and e-mail, or archive and encrypt, and choose what format to save your file in.

If you prefer to navigate in Windows Explorer, the drag-and-drop functions will also work there. Perform commands simply by right-clicking on a file.

If you choose to load it, Office Ready *StuffIt* works directly with Office documents. A toolbar is placed in your office application, allowing you to compress, expand and e-mail compressed office documents.

Sure, you can FTP (File Transfer Protocol) large files, provided the recipient is set up with an FTP server. But e-mailing large attachments isn't a good idea, because most e-mail systems have attachment size limits, usually set at 2 to 5 MB. Cramming huge files into a manageable size for e-mailing is a practical use of compression technology.

A good way to send a compressed file is as a Self-Extracting Archive (SEA), so the recipient can open it without having to install any software. Also, you can specify an e-mail be sent to you confirming extraction.

You can use *StuffIt* to automate your backups, and save yourself space on backup media. Many people use CD-R drives to back up data. It doesn't take long to fill a 650 or 700 MB CD. No, blank CDs aren't expensive, but if you back up daily, over time that cost adds up. We compressed a relatively small 30.4 MB folder into 15.5 MB. Your results will depend on the type of files you're archiving. However, on a larger scale, results similar to ours could decrease your storage costs significantly over a long time period. Also *StuffIt* offers the option of automatically sending your backups over a network to a system used for off-site storage, either by FTP or e-mail.

So why should a Windows users buy *StuffIt* if *WinZip* is free? *WinZip* only works with Windows, while *StuffIt* works with other operating systems, like Mac, Linux and Unix. We didn't try them all, but documentation indicates *StuffIt* reads more file types than *WinZip*. And *WinZip* doesn't encrypt files. ♦

more info

StuffIt Deluxe 7.5 for Windows

US\$39.99

Aladdin Systems

www.stuffit.com

Requirements:

Pentium or better

Windows 98/ME/NT/2000/XP

32 MB RAM



A thought struck me as I was setting up an AirPort network with my laptop the other day — did Apple call it "AirPort" because it is a networking "port" that magically flies data through the "air" to and from your computer? Or did they call it that because of the striking similarities that can be seen when this white mushroom-cap-shaped device is compared to an actual airport? Let's see if we can figure this mystery out.

When you purchase an Apple AirPort you really have no choices to make. It comes in one colour, one shape and one configuration. In this case, one size fits all. You don't have to worry about compatibility either. Just make sure your Mac has an AirPort wireless card installed and it will recognize any AirPort within range.

The same is true when you go to an airport to catch a flight. You don't choose your terminal nor the type of airplane you are going to fly on. They're all pretty much the same — couple of jet

Planes, trains and AirPorts

engines, wings, tail — and every time a jet is within range of another airport, it's recognized by that control tower.

Setting up an Apple AirPort can be a breeze, but like all walks in the park, there can occasionally be some rough terrain. Apple has gone to great lengths to create a true plug-and-play world. The AirPort I got was a demo unit that had been set up previously in a working environment. First, it was password protected. Now I suppose the upside to this is that password protection does work. If you have friends or family that are constantly using your AirPort connection for free Internet access — block 'em! And don't underestimate the importance of password protection with a wireless network. A friend of mine demonstrated how he could sit in his living room and log onto the wireless network of his next-door neighbour.

A soft reset clears the password and is in the troubleshooting section of the manual. After doing that, I found that access to this particular unit was restricted to the computers that were listed in its memory. A hard reset was the only way to clear everything and start from scratch. Information about

the hard reset was found at Apple's support site on the Web. When that was done, I had only to follow a few simple setup steps and suddenly my wireless network connection was alive and well.

When going through an airport most of us have a hassle free experience. Once in a while you get one loud mouth at the security station and suddenly everybody is a suspect. Sure, they smile as they go through your bags with a magnifying glass and let the drug dogs lick the chocolate you bought for your wife, but it doesn't make it better.

Apple claims that the AirPort is good for distances up to 50 metres. I suppose that could be true if you live in a house with no walls and no electrical interference. I don't know about you, but that's not my house. Cement and plaster walls are the biggest problem for these types of wireless devices.

As soon as you get a cement wall and 20 feet between the computer and the AirPort base, you lose the signal. That's why placing the base station close to where you will be working is essential. I had visions of working wirelessly everywhere in my house — in the kitchen, bedroom, outside and on the stairs.

Realistically, I still tend to stick near my office area. But now I can sit in a more comfortable chair with my feet up. Plus, once you have a connection, it stays. I haven't lost a download yet. And it's just as fast as a wired connection.

How far can an airplane go? A lot further than the Apple AirPort, but you do have to get out of your chair to get to one. And airplanes are pretty reliable too.

It seems to me that AirPort and airports actually have a lot in common. I doubt very much that Apple had airports in mind when designing their wireless wonder, but hey, a good idea is a good idea — fly with it. ♦

more INFO

AirPort Base Station is IEEE 802.11b Wi-Fi certified (tech talk meaning it works with a bunch of regular PCs too and non-Apple cards)

To learn more about the AirPort check out www.apple.com/airport

Requirements:
An Apple computer running Mac OS 9.0.4 or later and an AirPort card.
A PC can access the AirPort network after being set up by an Apple computer. The PC must have an IEEE 802.11b certified wireless card.

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REVIEWS



Locking the virtual front door

By ALAN ZISMAN

Have you noticed? Lately, the Internet doesn't seem to be as much fun as it used to be. What, a few years ago, was an exciting way to communicate and get news and information now has become increasingly painful to use.

With an increased number of viruses, hack attacks, pop-up Web pages and more, online has changed from the sort of community where people left their front doors unlocked to a place where everyone needs to invest in multiple deadbolts and bars, and peek out cautiously when anyone knocks.

Symantec's *Norton Internet Security 2003*, now in its third edition, promises to reduce the risks and inconveniences of being online.

Like previous versions, the 2003 edition (\$109) bundles the latest versions of the company's *Norton Antivirus* and *Norton Personal Firewall* (each available separately for \$69). Last year, NAV added the option to scan outgoing e-mail to catch any viruses before they infect others. New this year is the option to watch several instant messaging programs — though not the popular *ICQ* program. It's easier than ever to update the virus definitions automatically, no user intervention is needed. (A one-year subscription to Symantec's Live Update is included with the purchase of NAV or NIS; afterwards, you will need to renew to continue the automated service. Alternately, you can manually download the latest virus definition files for free.)

Like other software firewalls, *Norton Personal Firewall* hides your computer from hackers randomly probing the Internet for vulnerable systems. As well, it keeps track of programs on your computer that are trying to connect outside. When it is first installed, it searches your system and presents you with a list of Internet-capable programs. It makes recommendations that it thinks are "friendly." Resist temptation to simply allow everything listed free and easy Net access; instead, grant access to your Web browser and e-mail software. When other programs try to go online, the firewall will inform you, asking for permission.

A new privacy control feature blocks attempts to send credit card, bank

account and other sensitive information from your computer without your knowledge. Also new and very welcome is the option to screen out standard Web ads and annoying pop-up and pop-under browser windows. This feature works better than some others that I have tried, which often keep the main page from loading.

Like NAV, *Personal Firewall* uses Symantec's Live Update to maintain an up-to-date list of online hazards. You also get a one-year subscription when you install the software.

Norton Internet Security offers a single interface for access to antivirus and firewall features. As well, it includes a number of extra features. You may choose to use it to label e-mail messages with the phrase "Spam Alert." By my informal count, it caught about 80 per cent of the unwanted e-mail arriving on my system. It's up to you to decide where to go from there; the manual discusses how to set up rules in *Outlook Express* or filters in *Eudora* to automatically send labeled messages to the Trash, if desired.

Parents may choose to allow different levels of Internet activity for different users of the computer; editable profiles are included for children and teens, giving parents control over what their children are able to do online. (Once again, lists of blocked sites are updated regularly via the Live Update subscription). A \$149 Pro version of the product is designed to allow employers to block where employees can surf during work.

I would have liked to see the program monitor *ICQ* as well as other similar programs, and some of the options are difficult to discover. But *Norton Internet Security 2003* goes a long way to making the Internet a safer and more fun place to spend time. ♦

more INFO

Norton Internet Security 2003

\$109

Symantec

www.symantec.ca

Requirements:

Windows XP/ME/2000/98, 150 MHz processor (300 MHz for XP), 64 MB RAM (128 MB required for XP), 90 MB hard disk space, Internet Explorer 5.01 or higher, CD-ROM

Multi-region DVD players open up a world of movies

By TOM VENETIS

Being a movie buff in the age of DVDs can be frustrating. Such films as Pasolini's *Salo*, Wender's *Wings of Desire*, Lynch's *Eraserhead* and Fukasaku's *Battle Royale* are commercially available on DVD in Europe and Asia only, and there is little indication when these pictures will become available in North America. What is even more frustrating is that if one were to purchase the European DVDs of these pictures, they would not be playable on North American DVD players because of the region encoding.

Region encoding is the system created by movie studios to protect the worldwide copyright and distribution mechanisms of their movies on DVD. Since movies are released on different schedules around the world, the studios wanted to make sure that revenues were not lost by people buying DVDs from different regions and thereby diminishing the revenues generated by the local release of DVDs.

Because of the desire of the studios to protect revenues, different parts of the world now have different region codes, restricting the playability of DVDs (see sidebar for the different region codes). A DVD purchased in Europe has a Region 2 code, and only Region 2 capable DVD machines can play the discs. DVDs from North America, with their Region 1 encoding, are unplayable on Region 2 or other region-specific machines, just as non-Region 1 DVDs are unplayable on North American DVD players. So even if a film is released in North America first, consumers in Europe or Asia will have to wait for the studios to release region-specific versions of the movie.

So what is someone to do if they have a non-Region 1 DVD and want to watch it, or if they want to purchase a movie on DVD that is only available in Europe or Asia? The best way to get around the region encoding is to use a multi-region DVD player.

A player that doesn't discriminate

Multi-region players are designed to play all DVDs, regardless of the region encoding. The problem is that most of these machines are not generally available in consumer electronics stores. Instead, they are in stores that specialize exclusively in selling video and audio products, and there are a variety of stores around North America that

specialize in selling nothing but multi-region DVD players and accessories (see More Info box for stores).

Shane Gorman, wholesale and affiliate manager with the Montreal, Que.-based Merconnet, says that sales have been strong for their NextBase 2 multi-region/multi-function DVD player (\$284). The company has been selling the NextBase multi-region/multi-function player for about two years.

"Some of the sales are definitely to movie buffs that are looking to watch hard-to-find films from different parts of the world," Gorman says. "Others are frequent travellers overseas who often pick up a movie while travelling and want to see it when they get home."

Gorman says that multi-region DVD players are an outgrowth of the multi-region video player market that existed in the 1980s. In Europe, many households had video playback machines that could handle tapes recorded in different television standards — NTSC, PAL and SECAM. Europeans used these machines to watch movies that were only available in North America, or to watch tapes made by relatives living overseas. Many in North America wanted those machines, and when DVD players came along they began to actively demand similar multi-region machines for themselves.

"That is why you are starting to see here in North America a real boom for multi-region DVD players," says Gorman. "People now want to get their hands on a wider variety of releases and materials than are currently available. You saw this with movie collectors and those interested in such things as Japanese animation. Now it is becoming more of a mainstream thing."

Hollywood fights back

But not everyone is pleased with the growing popularity of multi-region DVD machines. While it is not illegal to sell such machines in North America, the major studios are not happy about the potential lost revenue. To try and dampen their growing popularity, the studios have been coming

up with several ways to make watching movies on these players much more difficult. Recently, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) developed the Regional Code Enhancing (RCE) system that is now being placed on many Region 1 DVDs. The RCE is made to prevent Region 1 DVDs from being played on multi-region DVD players, and there are talks underway to include this technology on DVDs released around the world. Still, many multi-region DVD players are now starting to be released with technology that gets around the RCE system.

Some consumers may be concerned



Region Codes:

1	Canada, United States, US Territories
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3	Southeast Asia, East Asia
4	Australia, New Zealand, Pacific Islands, Central America, Mexico, South America, Caribbean
5	Russia, India, Pakistan, Africa (except Egypt), North Korea, Mongolia
6	China
7	Not currently used
8	Special international cases (planes, cruise lines, etc.)

that since DVDs from around the world are encoded on different television standards they still may not be playable on North American televisions. Not to worry, as many of the players come with built-in mechanisms that convert the television information for North American televisions. If there are still problems, there are video converters that can convert the signal. Now, one can impress friends with those hard-to-find films and uncut gems that usually only those living outside North America can enjoy. ♦

FlashDio offers secure storage

By DAVE CHAPPELLE

There are plenty of small USB devices on the market that store encryption keys and passwords. However, the FlashDio allows the encryption of an entire drive and also stores encrypted files and folders.

Inserting the FlashDio into a system prompts a password window. Drivers must be installed on Windows 98 and Mac OS 8.6 computers. Enter a password twice and it's ready to use. Make sure you remember your password, because without it the FlashDio and whatever is stored on it, become useless.

Folders, subfolders and files can be encrypted by right-clicking on a folder or file and selecting the encryption option. To read an encrypted file, your password must be entered.

Sections of a hard drive or an entire drive can be encrypted. When the FlashDio is removed, the drive is safe until the device is re-inserted into the USB port.

Folders and files can also be saved to the FlashDio as if it were a removable disk, which is how it appears in the "My Computer" section.

While storage capacities from 16 MB up to 512 MB can be purchased,

the physical size of each FlashDio remains constant at 1x2.4x8.3 cm and 15 g. A plastic cap with a pocket clip covers the USB connector. A small hole at the other end can be used to attach the FlashDio to the included necklace or a key chain for safekeeping.

A 120 cm (4 ft.) cable is included, meaning you only have to reach around to the back of your system once to connect to USB ports found on the rear panel.

This technology offers several possibilities. Important information can be stored offsite, away from disaster and prying eyes. Simply removing the unit from the USB port renders any encrypted data unreadable. If large amounts of data on the system must be encrypted, removing the FlashDio is an easy method of doing so, without the hassle and potential dangers of physically removing the system hard disk.

It occurred to me that the portability, encryption, and sensitive data safekeeping capabilities make FlashDio a natural accessory in the toolkit of the "spooky characters" inhabiting agencies such as CSIS, the RCMP, the CIA or the FBI. Representatives of the Canadian distributor (Paratech Trading in Burnaby, B.C.) would neither confirm nor deny my suspicions. ♦

more info

FlashDio
US\$36-\$900, depending on storage capacity
Diography Inc.
www.flashdio.net
In Canada: Paratech Trading, (604) 808-5622

Requirements:
Mac OS 9.0 or higher
WinME/XP/2000
Drivers included for Win98 and Mac OS 8.6

the Grotto to life

By GEOFF MARTIN

It was bound to happen sooner or later. Many a young man has dreamed of living the life of *Playboy* magazine founder Hugh Hefner, and they'll soon be able to step into his virtual slippers, with the help of a Toronto video game developer.

Toronto's own Groove Games (www.groovegames.com) has been given the nod to develop a multi-platform game following Hefner's day-to-day activities after a deal was recently worked out between Arush Entertainment (www.arushgames.com), an Arizona-based video game distributor best known for the *Duke Nukem* franchise of games, and Playboy Enterprises.

According to Arush, the "world-building" game that's set to hit store shelves sometime in 2004 will simulate the life of Hugh Hefner, complete with hanging out in the Playboy mansion with his half-dozen live-in girlfriends and an ever-changing cast of Playboy Bunnies, as well as hosting the mansion's infamous parties. The game won't simply be a simulation of Hef's life of leisure, however, as players will also have to manage the business side of the magazine that makes his lifestyle possible.

According to Arush, the game will likely carry a Mature rating and will more than likely feature a topless woman or three, but the focus will be on "sexy, not sex."

It's all part of a growing trend of games marketed towards adult game players, as evidenced by the success of Acclaim's *BMX XXX* — a game that somehow manages to combine riding



BMX bicycles and visiting strip joints, to the consternation of parents and moral guardians everywhere.

Despite the storm of protests Groove Games' latest venture is likely to elicit, it's going to be an almost sure-fire home run, since *Playboy*'s 3.1 million subscribers spent a total of US\$300 million on video games last year. Now that the average gamer is rapidly approaching his or her thirties, it seems they're looking for female characters slightly more racy than Ms. Pac Man, and like it or not, we can only expect to see more games of this type in the future.



Taking the fight out of football

As the video game industry sinks to new depths with increasingly realistic and sordid depictions of sex and violence, not everyone with a stake in the industry is blindly going along with it, most notably the National Football League.

As the 2003 football playoffs were in full swing, the league semi-quietly approached Midway Games (www.midway.com) and suggested that if the company wished to retain the future rights to the NFL licence, the violent content in its *NFL Blitz 2003* should be toned down significantly in its next revision, if not eliminated altogether.

Midway's version of NFL football is what it calls an "adrenaline-style" sports video game, where the focus is on action over realism. In *NFL Blitz*, pass interference in the form of tackling, piledriving or clotheslining opposing players is not an offence punishable by a penalty, as it would be in a realistic portrayal of NFL football — in fact, it's wholeheartedly encouraged as an essential element of the game. Fighting with other players after a whistle is blown is also encouraged, and players can even adjust their settings to allow more "fighting time" after each whistle, making the console game a cartoonish hybrid of football and professional wrestling.

Gene Goldberg, the NFL vice-president of consumer products, told the media recently that the over-the-top action to be found in *NFL Blitz* is "not what goes on when players are on the field ... Next year, we will dial this back a little more. We're going to err on the side of conservatism," he said.

What's good for the goose ...

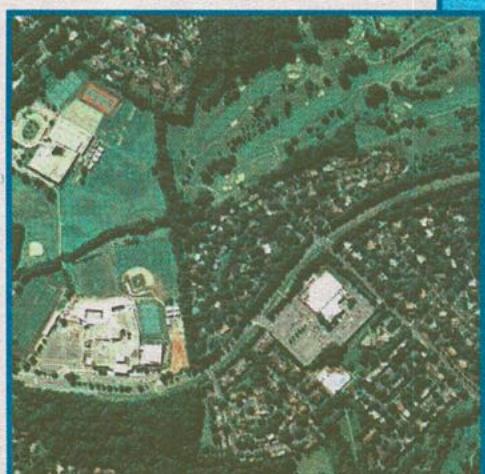
John Poindexter is the brains of the Total Awareness Network, a project of the US government that is aiming to aggregate data on all its citizens from various sources, in order to identify "potential terrorists," but lately, he's the one who's being watched.

The latest brainchild of the Poindexter's Information Awareness Office in the Pentagon has privacy advocates justifiably worried to the point of near-panic, since it will combine data from credit cards, travel activities, school records, medical records and other sources of information. Not content to take this perceived assault on their privacy lying down, several activists have taken to turning the watchful eye of Big Brother on Poindexter himself.

The trouble for Poindexter started when a columnist for *SF Weekly*, a San Francisco-based magazine, published Poindexter's e-mail address and home phone number, which he said were in the public domain, and therefore free for anyone to distribute. The info quickly began popping up at hundreds of other Web sites, and Poindexter was forced to have the number changed. Privacy advocates continued their Web-based campaign and posted satellite photographs of Poindexter's house that are available for purchase from satellite imaging company *GlobeXplorer* (www.globexplorer.com), as well as maps detailing how to get there.

Some Web sites have taken the campaign a big step further and are urging people to simulate a future facial recognition system, which some say is the next logical step in the Total Information Awareness Network, by distributing Poindexter's photograph. Should they ever recognize Poindexter in their presence, everyone from serving staff in restaurants to toll booth collectors are being encouraged to post details of his activities on the Web or even to deny him services, telling him simply that he's been identified as a potential security risk.

John Gilmore, one of the co-founders of the Electronic Frontier Foundation (www.eff.org), an electronic privacy group, posted a message detailing his support for the campaign and said that he too had posted Poindexter's details because he felt "it would be good to have an early public demonstration of just how bad life could become for such targeted individuals." ♦



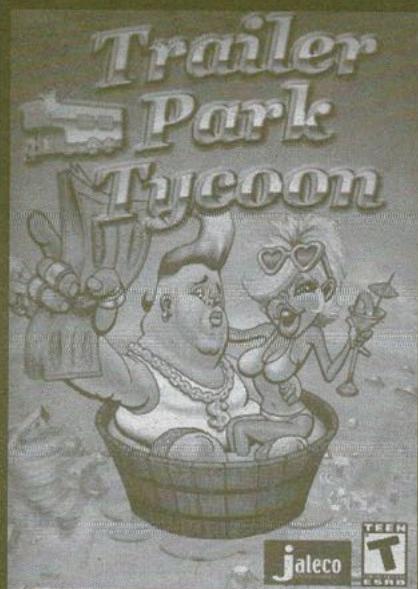
Trailer Park Tycoon takes the now-familiar "tycoon" model and plops it down in the "colourful" world of — wait for it — trailer parks. Yeehaw!

Each game consists mainly of placing trailers of various types in preset locations in order to attract residents (who pay you rent) and then adding amenities (restaurants, laundry facilities and so on) to keep your residents fed and entertained. You also need to add a variety of "ornaments" (stacks of tires, propane tanks, shot-up car bodies, junk sculptures, barbecue pits and other trailer-culture treasures) to each trailer's yard.

Ornaments are the key to success (and in many ways, provide most of the fun). Each resident has preferences in one or both of two "styles" of trailer-park life: Trashy vs. flashy and cool vs. old school. These two style values are mutually exclusive; that is, trashy subtracts from flashy and vice versa.

Keeping residents happy (and paying) requires that you satisfy their predilections (represented by colour-coded number values). So if Billie Joe likes old school, you keep her happy by making sure that her trailer (which includes her home and the surrounding area) has a high enough old school value.

Some trailers are specialized and come



Pink flamingo heaven

with a high rating in one or both styles, but most are relatively low. Ornaments

are used to modify the two style values. Generic trailers are also upgradeable (to single-wide and double-wide, naturally), and these upgrades expand each trailer's yard (allowing more ornaments to modify its style values).

This is where the game gets tricky. Upgraded trailers are worth a lot more rent money, but the expanded yards may bring neighbouring trailers into style conflicts. For example, if Billie Joe's trailer is upgraded and now overlaps with Bobbie Sue's yard, and Bobbie Sue's trailer is cool, it will reduce Billie Joe's old school rating, which will make her unhappy.

As the game progresses, residents' style demands will grow, and the balancing act becomes harder if you haven't arranged your trailers properly.

Tabloid tragedies

Goals usually consist of reaching a particular style value for your trailer park (300 trashy, say) or squeezing a certain dollar amount out of your residents before a time limit runs out.

In the end, though, *TPT* seems more like an amusement than a strategy game. Most of the enjoyment comes from the weird and wonderful characters, places, things and events that occur as you play. Tabloid headlines chart your progress, and UFO invasions, tor-

nados and meteor showers are occupational hazards.

There's also a "first-person" option that lets you take control of residents (and cats, dogs and pretty much anything else that moves). You can move them around and make them fight or be nice to others (or to themselves — which makes them line dance, sadly).

On the other hand, there aren't a lot of scenarios to play: Just four stand-alone challenges, four open-ended "sandboxes" and two "tycoon" modes (consisting of four "linked" scenarios each). The pace of the game is such that you usually don't have time to really enjoy your park or interact with the residents — you're too busy monitoring rents and style needs.

Still, the game is quite funny and will amuse those with a taste for the bizarre. ♦

more info

Trailer Park Tycoon
\$45 (street)
Jaleco Entertainment
www.jaleco.com/trailerparktycoon



Minimum requirements:
Windows 98/ME/2000/XP, 450 MHz CPU (600 MHz recommended), 64 MB RAM (128 MB rec.), 16 MB Direct3D or OpenGL 1.1 compatible video card (32 MB rec.)



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While the snow is still on the ground, "snowbirds" migrate to Florida to wile away the winter season and will likely get in a few rounds of golf while there.

Those of us that are not so lucky must placate the golfing itch by hitting the virtual links. Fortunately, *Links 2003* puts its predecessors to shame and is much more like a true golfing simulation than ever before.

Where golf games have traditionally required players to hit timed button presses to make a shot (one to start the swing, one at the top of the scale for power and one on the down stroke to determine the hook or slice), *Microsoft Links 2003* simulates the back swing and down stroke using the mouse. Players pull back for the back swing, then return and pull through for the down stroke. Accuracy is determined by how close to straight up and down the mouse moves, making the game much more like the incredibly popular *Golden Tee Golf*'s control scheme. If you've never seen *Golden Tee* before, just go to a bar and look for a gaggle of men swearing and hammering a trackball into submission.

Hit the Links



from the warmth of home

For those intimidated by the new control scheme, Microsoft Game Studios also included the easy swing, which is designed so younger kids can get in on the action, as well as the classic three-click swing from previous *Links* games.

However, once golfers hit a few drives with the Real Time Swing, there's no going back to the old way. There is an extensive tutorial that covers using the new swing style as well as general gameplay.

Aside from the improvements to the control scheme, other notable additions

since the last *Links* outing in 2001 are new and much improved 3D golfer animations, which add believability to the game, and a new career mode, which is fun to play through.

Also new for 2003 is an improved Arnold Palmer Course Designer, which, as the name implies, allows golfers to create courses and post or trade them on the *Links Country Club* Web site (www.linkscountryclub.com) or

through *Links* fan sites. The course designer is well featured and allows golfers to create just about any course they can imagine – whether or not it has a foothold in reality is completely up in the air. In addition to being able to create their own courses, gamers upgrading from past versions of *Links* can import courses from as far back as the 1997 version of the game.

The graphics in *Links 2003* are nothing short of spectacular. While the look and motion of the players has been greatly improved over past versions, the

courses themselves are equally impressive. The course scenery is true to life, water looks pristine, the crowd looks quite believable, even the sand bunkers show individual rake marks and footprints.

Online play is also improved in this latest version of *Links*. Golfers have the option of going head-to-head in online tournaments against up to seven others, playing the *Links Tour*, while the *Links Country Club* Web site matches gamers of relative skill in tournaments where the results are posted to the site for all to see – *Links* also incorporates e-mail tournaments, where any number of golfers can compete on or offline by automatically sending results to the tournament organizer, who in turn sends out tournament standings to participants through e-mail. ♦

more INFO

Links 2003

\$59.99

Microsoft Game Studios
www.microsoft.com/games

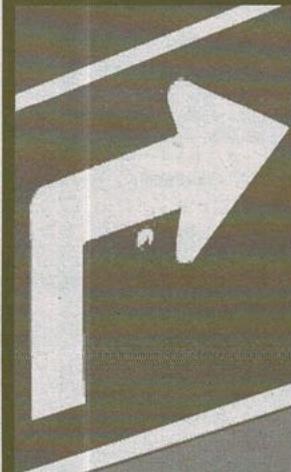
EVERYONE



Requirements:

Pentium II 400 MHz, 64 MB RAM (for Win98/ME), 128MB RAM (for Win2000/XP and for Course Designer), 390 MB hard drive space (950 MB additional for Course Designer), 16 MB 3D accelerator card, 4X CD-ROM drive.

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Take on Tiger in PGA Tour 2003

By ANDREW MOORE-CRISPIN

While Microsoft Game Studio's *Links 2003* caters to golf sim players, *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2003* successfully

blends the sim golf feel with slightly more arcade style gameplay and options.

Tiger Woods 2003 uses a similar control scheme to *Links 2003*, where mouse movement is used to determine back swing and follow through, giving golfers the swing control that most preceding golf games have sorely lacked. However, this is where similarities between the two games end.

Tiger Woods 2003 is much more about the single player experience than *Links 2003*. EA did include options for online play, but are charging a monthly server access fee for EA Sports games. A two-month subscription is included with the game. Up to four players can compete against each other online in a tournament or in stroke or match play.

The heart of *Tiger Woods 2003* is in the tournament mode, where golfers compete to earn cash to buy attribute points to progress through the different ranks (amateur, pro, champion and master). As can be expected, the purses get bigger and the competition gets stiffer as gamers progress.

Where *Links* games have traditionally taken what some would consider to be

the high road by creating golf sims as opposed to golf games, EA's *Tiger Woods* franchise has traditionally been an arcade golf affair. Not so this time around. While the console roots of the game sometimes show through despite the noticeably sharper graphics and differing control scheme (console versions of the game use the analogue control sticks of the game pad to execute the "TrueSwing"), Tiger's PC outing is a completely different game from EA's console golf games bearing his name.

That said, some elements found in console incarnations of the game are also present in the PC game. Trophy Balls, which are awarded for making a long putt, difficult chip, long drive or other more creative objectives, like your first bogey-free round or scoring three birdies in a row, are part of both versions, though in the PC game, they take a much less central role.

The Career mode in *Tiger Woods 2003* is a fun diversion, but not quite what golf sim players might be expecting. Rather than starting off with a character and building up his or her stats by earning money in tournaments, gamers play a series of practice exercises like driving, chipping and putting contests. While honing your character's skills in these contests, other golfers on the cir-

cuit challenge you to matches where your character can earn some extra cash. There are also scheduled stroke play tournaments throughout the career, but these usually only take place on the front nine of a course, and as such are a bit unsatisfying.

The in-game graphics are quite amazing and are second only to actually being on the eight included courses (including Pebble Beach and St. Andrews). The golfer animations are similarly realistic, with the golfers actually looking like they are on the course, as opposed to the photo-realistic golfers standing out from their digital surroundings, as most previous golf games have done. ♦

more INFO

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2003
\$49.99
EA Sports
www.ea.com/easports



Minimum:
Pentium II 333 MHz, 64 MB RAM, Windows 95/98/ME/2000/XP, DirectX 8.0, 8 MB DirectX-compatible 3D accelerator, DirectX-compatible sound card, 4x CD-ROM drive, 1 GB hard-disk space, mouse, keyboard.

Recommended:
700 MHz Intel Pentium III (or AMD equivalent) Processor, 128 MB or more RAM, 32 MB T&L supported video card or greater video card with DirectX 8.1 compatible driver, 1 GB or more hard drive space.

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Game On!



A long, long time ago, in a galaxy not so far away, video game publisher LucasArts began creating *Star Wars* video games to suit all kinds of players, be they fans of simulations, strategy games, action/adventure hybrids, racers or 3D shooters. So, why have role-playing gamers been left out in the cold? That is, until now.

Knights of the Old Republic will be the very first video game RPG set in the *Star Wars* universe.

Not surprisingly, LucasArts turned to Edmonton-based BioWare – the makers of such critically acclaimed and successful RPGs as the *Baldur's Gate* series and more recently, *Neverwinter Nights* – to create the ultimate *Star Wars* role-playing game experience.

TC! made the trek to the capital of Alberta to spend some serious hands-on

time with the ambitious and promising *Star Wars* game, due out on the Xbox this spring.

Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic (*KOTOR*) takes places roughly 200 generations, or about 4,000 years, before the events of the *Star Wars* films. It's a time of epic conflict between Jedi and Siths – and the good guys ain't winning.

This is where you come in. But the path you choose is dictated by your actions; by the end of the game, you may be heroic and save the Republic or become an evil force within the galaxy. Like most RPGs, players can spend time at the start of the game creating their custom character or they can simply jump into the game with a few button taps.

KOTOR is a party-based game, so other allied characters – be they humans, aliens or droids – will join the travelling troupe throughout this 50+ hour adventure. In fact, the many sub-quests will vary depending on the members in your party, as will the dialogue trees, story twists and cutscenes. This makes the game much more replayable than most.

And talk about a mammoth undertaking – the game features 10 worlds to explore, multiple mini-games, more

than 100 pre-rendered and in-game cutscenes and over 12,000 lines of spoken dialogue (with lip-syncing). There's even a significant love interest in the game, but BioWare won't reveal any details on that just yet.

The central hub in the game is Ebon Hawk, a huge Millennium Falcon-esque space ship that serves as a place to meet other NPCs (non-player characters), swap members of your party, get assignments and begin traveling to the various planets.

While exploration and puzzle-solving are an integral part of the gameplay, the combat is what will keep most console players glued to the tube until the wee hours of the morn. The battle system is turn-based, but the player has a few options on how to go about fighting enemies. One way is equip your party with weapons or Force powers (there are 50 of these in the game) and begin targeting baddies one by one, almost in real-time. Those who prefer strategy and tactics can pause the game and assign orders to their party before resuming. As

a neat twist, the combat goes into slow-motion when the player needs to bring up the action menu to swap weapons, heal characters and so on.

KOTOR is played from a third-person perspective – which is ideal for a party-based game – and visual touches such as swooping camera angles and plenty of cut-scene sequences help reinforce the cinematic experience.

Both the indoor and outdoor areas are highly detailed, with an effort made to make the player feel he or she is walking around in a living, breathing world.

Role-playing game fans and *Star Wars* enthusiasts alike should easily find solace in *Knights of the Old Republic*. Not only is it the most ambitious project LucasArts and BioWare have undertaken, but it may very well be their finest. ♦

DECEMBER'S PHOTO SPREE WINNER



THE WINNER:

Congratulations to Wayne Harvey whose image titled "Blurred Skaters" won our fourth Photo Spree contest. Wayne receives a Lexmark Z65p Photo Jetprinter for his efforts.

The image was shot using a Fuji S602 digital camera using a 1/1.8 shutter speed to blur the fast moving skaters while exposing the dark background.

We were faced with another difficult decision in choosing the winner from the more than 40 entries for the Nighttime Photography Photo Spree assignment.

Again, congratulations Wayne Harvey for submitting the winning image.

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Toronto Computes!'s 5th Photo Spree contest form. All submissions must contain this information

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THE RULES: You must use a digital camera to capture the subject. Work can be submitted via e-mail (contest@tcp.ca). Accompanying your photo should be the make and model of the camera you used, the names of any software you used to modify the image and, if possible, the f/stop and shutter speed you used to take the photo.

Submit your photographs, along with the information from the form below, by March 7th, 2003. You can submit up to three photographs, all of which must be accompanied by a submission form. Entries must be submitted via e-mail. Files should be no bigger than 500 KB. One photo per e-mail.

Contest Rules: Prizes must be claimed by April 18th, 2003. Winners must provide valid identification upon claiming prize. The prizes awarded are not transferable and cannot be redeemed for cash. To enter and to be eligible to win, persons must be residents of Canada, and not employees or be domiciled with an employee of Canada Computes!, its affiliate companies, or advertising or promotional agencies. The winners will be selected by Toronto Computes! on March 14th, 2003 from among all eligible entries received on or before contest close date. Winners will be contacted by telephone or e-mail. In the event that they cannot be contacted within the first week following the contest another entrant will be selected. All entries become the property of Toronto Computes! and may be used in subsequent advertisements for the contest. All entries must be submitted by their artist and must be original work.

Do you have a Need for Speed?

By NESTOR GULA

The first game I ever played on a PC computer, a 386SX16 by the way, was *Need for Speed* — the first version of that game, as I recall. You would steer, accelerate and brake using the keyboard, and the graphics were atrocious. It was not a pleasant experience.

Fast-forward about 10 years, and I'm playing *Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit 2* (NFS) — the latest in the line of this stalwart computer game. You still get to drive exotic cars most could never afford as recklessly as you would ever dare on impossibly twisty highways, dodging innocent traffic and police. The exotic cars are many here — Ferrari, Lamborghini, Porsche, Jaguar, Aston Martin, BMW and the like. There are a few "semi-affordable" cars, namely the Corvette Z06, Dodge Viper GTS and Ford SVT Mustang Cobra R. There are even cars not available in North America, like the Vauxhall VX220, Opel Speedster and the Lotus Elise.

The more cops you avoid and the faster you go in a race, the more points you amass and that, in turn, unlocks cars and a bevy of tracks.

In the Hot Pursuit mode, players compete with other AI cars and try to escape from police. You get points by shaking the police off and finishing ahead of the competition. You get more points if you take the advanced level and use manual shifting. In the Championship mode, players compete with other cars in a series of races for the World Championship —

there are no police here.

I used a Logitech Momo Force steering wheel and the feeling was fine. I found that setting the game to an advanced level gave me much better control over the car and a good game experience. An irritating fact about the AI cars is that they seem to always come off best when you are involved in an altercation with them. Both you

and the other car will go into a spin, and that car's forward pace will not be affected, while you lose valuable seconds. As well, the cops are biased. If you blow past a radar trap side-by-side with an opponent, the cops will target you for pursuit (this involves them bumping your rear quarter panel and sending you into a spin) and let the opponent go on their merry way.

A great addition to this franchise is the "Be the cop" feature. In the Single Challenge mode, you can be the pursuer chasing after the cars that dusted you in previous races. This is fun because you can call on backup, set spike strips, set up road blocks and even call for helicopter support.

The latest *Need for Speed* is a hoot. Although it is highly unrealistic, especially in terms of the damage that these fragile exotic cars suffer while bumping with sturdy police cars — this unrealism does not detract from the sheer joy of driving with reckless abandon, throwing caution to the wind. ♦

more info

Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit 2
\$53.99
Electronic Arts
www.ea.com



Requirements:

450 MHz Intel Pentium III or 500 MHz AMD Athlon processor or higher, Windows 98/ME/2000/XP, 128 MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM, 1.2 GB free hard disk space, Direct3D capable video card with 16 MB memory and DirectX 8.1 compatible driver, DirectX 8.1 compatible soundcard, keyboard and mouse

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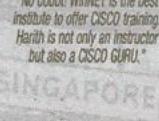
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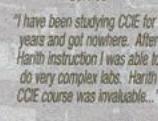
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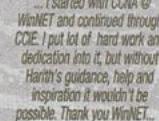
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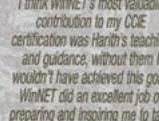
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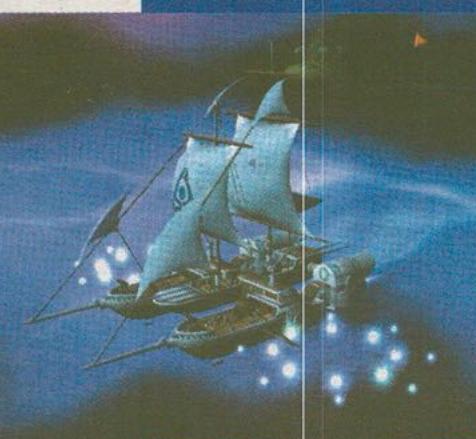
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CYBERPLAY



Battle at Procyon continues adventures of Jim Hawkins

By CHRIS TALBOT

The newest Disney Interactive title, *Treasure Planet: Battle at Procyon*, developed by Vancouver's Barking Dog Studios, continues the adventures of Jim Hawkins, the main character in the recent Disney animated flick, *Treasure Planet*. However, this computer game isn't kids' play; it's a serious real-time naval strategy game that can be played by people of all ages.

The story takes place five years after the adventures in *Treasure Planet*, and Jim is now at the end of his schooling as a cadet in Her Majesty's Royal Navy. The game begins during the graduation exercises of Jim's class, where Jim and his fellow grads must prove what they have learned during their time at the academy (which is learned by taking the basic and advanced tutorials, of course). The exercises are rudely interrupted by a pirate attack, and Jim must intercept the pirates and fend them off. Simple enough.

Beginner real-time strategy (RTS) players will probably find the ease and simplicity of the point-and-click interface to be an excellent introduction to RTS games. Commands are all given through the use of the mouse, so there's no need to worry about complex keyboard commands. For instance, moving a ship is as simple as pointing the mouse at an area in the Etherium (space) and clicking the left mouse button. Players move the camera by holding down the right mouse button and moving left or right to pan and forward and backward to zoom in and out. Moving the mouse over an enemy ship will change the mouse icon to a target and a simple left mouse button click will give the order to fire on the ship.

The bottom quarter of the screen is taken up by command buttons. Clicking on any button will issue the appropriate command. This control panel is also

where players can access the map showing the area around Jim's ship (or fleet).

Speaking of the ships, they are rendered in 3D and look quite good. Animations are smooth and fun to watch. However, the game is played out in 2D. Movement through space is only on the X and Y axes (I haven't seen *Treasure Planet* yet, but I've been assured it's this way in the movie – also, it's simpler for beginners if they don't have to worry about attacks from above or below).

Advanced players might find the game to be a bit too simple, but it's still good for a few hours worth of fun. The game gives explicit directions to accomplish goals and there is always a compass just below the ship that points in the direction you have to go to complete the next goal in any given mission. In that way, the game baby-sits players, which might get a bit irksome for experienced RTS gamers. However, the naval battles are fun to play, so it's worth overlooking *Battle at Procyon's* attempts to satisfy RTS newbies.

Overall, the game is best suited to younger gamers with an interest in tactics and strategy or to RTS gamers who just can't seem to remember bizarre or complicated keyboard commands. Simple to install and easy to learn to play, it's worth joining Her Majesty's Royal Navy in *Treasure Planet: Battle at Procyon*. ♦

more INFO

Treasure Planet: Battle at Procyon
\$29.99
Disney Interactive
www.disneyinteractive.com



Requirements:
Windows 98/ME/XP, Pentium II 450 MHz processor or faster, 64 MB of RAM (128 MB for Windows XP), 750 MB of free hard disk space, CD-ROM drive, 16-bit DirectX 8.1-compatible soundcard, 16 MB video card with 3D acceleration

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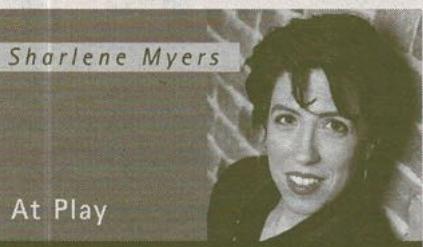
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Symptoms of involuntary multi-tasking



I suffer from multi-tasking. In spite of its regular appearance in help wanted ads, I'm convinced multi-tasking is not a helpful quality. I'm compelled, while working, to switch between programs to check my e-mail or my calendar in case I've missed something. If a question, however unrelated to what I'm doing, pops into my head, I face an uncontrollable urge to pop onto the Web and research the answer, right this minute. In fact, I've been meaning to find out ...

Oops. See what I mean? It's a habit I keep meaning to break, and maybe I should have made it a New Year's resolution, but ... Well, I just spent the last 20 minutes looking up the current wisdom on keeping New Year's resolutions and ... need I say more?

The trouble is, for me, multi-tasking is

not doing a number of things at once, but rather leaving one thing unfinished to do another and then either worrying about what else I should be doing, or forgetting what I was doing in the first place.

It's also a habit that isn't really very game-compatible. Most games take over the whole computer. What if I'm playing and someone is trying to message me, or sends me an e-mail and is waiting anxiously for my reply?

If I desperately need to look something up online while I'm playing, I have to quit the whole game, open up a Web browser, do the search, then start the game up all over again. I may have to set up a home network and keep two computers on my desk, just to get around this problem.

This came to light recently while I was playing *Tennis Masters Series 2003*. I've watched some tennis on television occasionally, and even hit a ball around a court a few times, but it wasn't until I started playing my first exhibition match on the PC that I realized I know nothing about tennis. Though I was sure I could find out everything I needed to

know online, and in spite of the fact that it would have given me a chance to check my e-mail, I was reluctant to exit the program.

The manual helpfully points out that the game gives me the choice of four different serves, which can be varied by the level of power and precision I put behind them. The trouble is, I have no idea of the difference between these types of serves and how the power level, for example, might affect them. Plus, which might be the best serve to use against which of the three playing styles?

To be fair, there are some brief explanations and "coach tips," but most of my serves are still only guesses. I figured if I varied them every now and then, I might keep my opponent on his toes. Well, that's the theory. In reality, I think I've only had an opponent miss one of my serves. Needless to say, I haven't won a match yet.

Incidentally, while I was looking through the manual, I noticed the following: "If you or your child experience any of the following symptoms: Dizziness, blurred vision, eye or muscle

twitches, loss of consciousness, disorientation, any involuntary movement or convulsion, while playing a video game, IMMEDIATELY discontinue use and consult your doctor."

Wow. I think it goes without saying that if I lost consciousness I would immediately discontinue playing. But what I'm wondering is if these symptoms can escalate, because I'm pretty sure I've been experiencing involuntary muscle twitches. How else can I explain the slow motion replay that shows my player actually ducking away from the ball? Or the one where the ball is heading toward one corner of the court and my player is running in the opposite direction? Or the occasional quick swipe of the racquet through the air in spite of the fact the ball is clearly on the other side of the net? Some sports programs compile a weekly montage of sports bloopers for the entertainment of their highly skilled remote control wielding audiences. Maybe I should send them my clips.

I'll do that right after I look up "tennis rules and strategy" online. And check my e-mail. ♦

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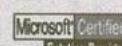
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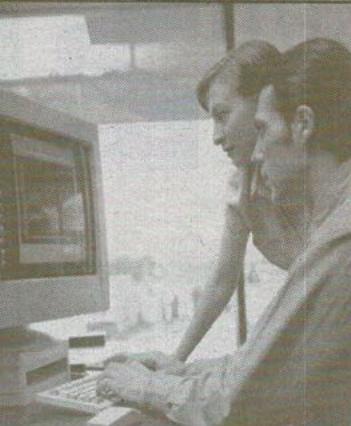
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PC gaming:

What's coming ...

By CHRIS TALBOT

The non-stop holiday release schedule kept us hopping throughout November and December, but with the holidays now over, this is a quiet time for PC game releases. The relative silence from game publishers and developers usually lasts until sometime in February, with a few releases in January.

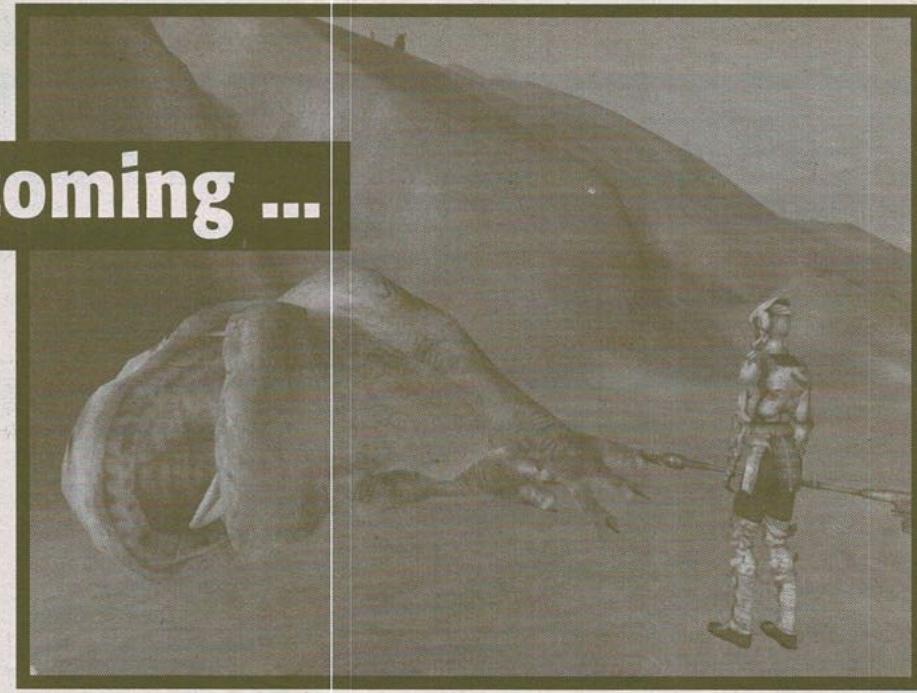
Of course, some major games get held over to January or February. For instance, *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell*, developed at Ubi Soft's Montreal Studio, will be on store shelves shortly. The hit Xbox game about an agent working for a top secret NSA agency called Third Echelon should be just as fun to play on the PC as it was on Xbox. We should have a review of the game in next month's issue.

We've been hearing about some interesting upcoming games lately. Here are three of them:

Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided

Currently in its second of three rounds of beta testing, *Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided* is a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) set in George Lucas's popular space opera universe. Journalists first caught a whiff of *Galaxies* back in 2000, then saw the first demo of the game at Electronic Entertainment Expo 2002, and it's been getting a lot of attention (and for good reason).

The MMORPG will allow thousands of gamers to interact in the *Star Wars* universe in a way similar to that of *EverQuest* (incidentally, *Galaxies* is being developed by Sony Online Entertainment, the same company that brought us *EverQuest*). The game will take place in the time between the original *Star Wars* movie and *The Empire Strikes Back*. Players can create any number of different types of characters, but official *Star Wars* characters are off limits (however, some of them might appear from time to time throughout the course of the storyline). Participants in the massively multiplayer game (for those not familiar with MMORPGs, note that there is no offline portion of the game – it's online only) will be able to set themselves up with a virtual life (or lives) in the *Star Wars* universe on any of more than nine planets. It's still unknown exactly how many locations



will be available at the outset of the game, but certain *Star Wars* staples like Tatooine, Naboo, Yavin IV and Endor have already been confirmed.

A number of professions and skill sets will also be available to create just about any type of *Star Wars* character imaginable, but players going into the game expecting to be Jedi should know it's not a career choice at first. SOE is putting a tight leash on the secrets to becoming a Jedi, and it's expected only a tiny percentage of the *Galaxies* community will actually learn to master the Force.

Expect *Galaxies* to arrive in stores on April 15. The game will include a one-month subscription to the service. Monthly fees have yet to be announced, though. Expect them to be somewhere in the vicinity of US\$10 per month.

Also, SOE is already planning on its first expansion, which will probably be out six months to a year after *Galaxies* launches. Space will add space travel and starships to the game (potential Han Solos will just have to wait – sorry).

Greyhawk: The Temple of Elemental Evil

Pen-and-paper *Dungeons & Dragons* players will need no introduction to *The Temple of Elemental Evil*. As one of the most popular modules for *D&D* (it goes for big bucks on eBay), it's a classic, but it's about to enter the computer realm.

Based in the semi-popular World of Greyhawk (most *D&D* PC games are based on the more popular Forgotten Realms world), *The Temple of Elemental Evil* is being developed by Troika Games and published by Infogrames. Troika, a relatively new development studio, is known for its first and only release thus far, *Arcanum: Of Steamworks and*

Magick Obscura, a fantasy RPG in a setting resembling the Age of Steam. *Arcanum*, which was published by Sierra, was released last year and received relatively favourable reviews.

The original *Temple of Elemental Evil* pen-and-paper module was for the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons, 1st Edition* rule set, but Troika developers have updated the adventure to the current *3rd Edition* rules, which most *D&D* PC games are based on. From what we've been hearing, everything has been converted over and the story has remained somewhat intact. It sounds like a number of changes have been made, but we'll have to wait for the finished product to see just what they are.

According to sources on the Web, *Greyhawk: The Temple of Elemental Evil* could make it to stores as early as June.

Rome: Total War

Last but certainly not least, a number of rumours about a new *Total War* game started surfacing toward the end of last year. It seems the rumours were true, although we've yet to see an official announcement.

The third game in the series will carry the name *Rome: Total War*, following in the wake of *Shogun: Total War* and *Medieval: Total War*. It's unknown when war game fans might get their hands on *Rome*, but they can probably expect gameplay very similar to the first two games in the *Total War* series.

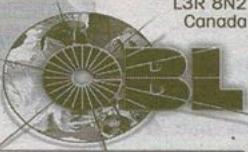
Of course, Activision isn't quite finished with the second title in the series. *Medieval: Total War* will be getting an expansion pack in the spring called *Viking Invasion*. According to the official press release, the expansion will take place in AD 790, when the Norse invaded neighbouring nations. ♦

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Profile: Josh Avery

While some of us are still grappling with the finer points of Crayola (those stick drawings are fabulous!), there are people in the art community who have moved on to entirely new and considerably more sophisticated modes of expression. Josh Avery, a 25-year-old graduate of the Ontario College of Art and member of the famefame media label (famefame.com), falls into the second slot. Using nothing more than the detritus of our consumption-driven society, Avery employs "trash technology" to create kinetic sculpture. In layman's terms, he takes apart machines and reassembles the parts to create something new.

You can interact with Avery's latest machination, "Gorgon," Feb. 13-23 at ne plus ultra project space (ne-plus-ultra.com), 1080 Queen St. W.

Who: Josh Avery, kinetic sculpture and video artist.

Computer now used: PC Pentium I; "I also have another PC — a 286. I actually do use it. For doing video I use other people's computers. I use my 286 more than I use my other PC simply because all it has on it is DOS and I use that with

a FORTH (a programming language for robotics) board that I have."

Computer first used: Apple IIc

Favourite computer: "I must say I do prefer PC. I see the attraction to Apple but there's elements to it I don't like ... I guess it's some ideology about Apple that I don't like."

Other technical gadgetry in use at this time (cells, PDA, etc.): None

Do you use your computer for play? "I'm pretty much a reformed video game addict. Same with the Internet. I don't have either because I know I'd use them too much. In the past, I would easily spend 6-8 hours a night doing that kind of stuff."

Best thing about the technology you have: "It's good enough for what I need. Just giving myself certain restrictions may be healthy for me. The technology that I do spend money on now are tools."

Worst thing: "Restrictions that impede me. Sometimes it's good and other times

it pisses me off to no end."

What can't you live without? "Leatherman multi-tool. Because I was without one and it was a huge pain in the ass."

Is there anything you think you need? "Space. That's the one thing I've been trying to get for the last year or so. But a really nice computer would be nice to have. I used to work in video a lot and then I stopped for about a year, and now I have to use other people's computers. If I had my own I would be able to do a lot more work."

What frustrates you the most about technology? "Trying to use technology that is badly planned out — bad interface or bad design. And then if you're going to try and fix that it just takes you a huge amount of time."

Personal take on issues dealing with technology: "I don't think it can really be broken down into good or bad. I think it's just more how it is the individual decides to use it. I see it as a tool and any tool can be a weapon."



Technology seems to be targeted to take from people — you're chained down by technology, you're chained down by cars, computers, whatever crap you happen to have that costs a lot of money and you have to pay it off. It just seems you end up getting trapped by the crap that you own and technology seems to help that a lot." ♦

—Samson Okalow

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